



City of Ceylon realizes value of local control of utilities Telecom provider's service pitfalls exposed in small town near Iowa border

by Steve Downer

Local control is more than a slogan for municipal utilities.

The value of local control is seen in cities large and small, including little Ceylon, located between the I-90 cities of Fairmont and Jackson, and just north of the Iowa border.

The Ceylon Water and Light Department was founded in 1916. The city council and staff work with a variety of partners to provide up-to-date water, wastewater and electric service.

The city has not delved into phone or internet service, and has recently been a poster child for Frontier Communications service pitfalls.

According to numerous published reports, underground communications cable in the city went bad. Frontier responded and restored communications. Field staff ran temporary cable above ground, then turned

the task of burying the cable over to a different department within the company.

And there the matter dropped. Cable crossed Main Street from tree to tree. Clusters of cable were wrapped around tree trunks. Some people, not wanting to cut cable while mowing grass, ran it above propane tanks, or attached it to fence posts.

City officials repeatedly requested that Frontier fix the problem. They even reached out to the state attorney general's office for help. Three years went by.

"It got ugly here for a while," said City Clerk Mary Muller. "We couldn't get anywhere."

Councilmember John Gibeau went after Frontier, hard, on Facebook. He wasn't alone. With more than 600 complaints flooding into the state, regulators opened an investigation.



Ceylon city hall is located on Main Street. The city was originally named 'Chanhassen,' but that name was taken. Legend has it that a group meeting in the general store plucked the name 'Ceylon' from a tea box.

At a Minnesota Public Utilities Commission hearing in Slayton, Gibeau said Ceylon's plight proved Frontier's "corporate indifference" to rural customers.

"If we don't have proper internet," Gibeau was quoted as saying, "you can kiss these small towns goodbye."

Ceylon: see page 4 please

T&O Conference proves a hit with municipal utilities

MMUA held its annual Technical & Operations Conference Dec. 4-6, at the Best Western Plus Kelly Inn, St. Cloud.

The meeting immediately grabbed the attention of the assembled utility managers, superintendents, crew leaders and foremen, with a Tuesday afternoon presentation on Safety First, Restoration Second.

The Minnesota Rural Electric Association presentation focused on the personal stories of two lineworkers who responded to storm damage outages and experienced an accident. The discussion included nine changes made by the cooperative and asked the question, "Could this accident have happened at my place?" Attendees walked away with actions for making sure it doesn't.

The next talk was something completely different, as Nathan Mitchell of the American Public Power Association presented on Cybersecurity: Understanding the Risks & Threats and also took a look at the APPA eReliability Tracker System. MMUA members are eligible to purchase an eReliability Tracker subscription at a reduced rate thanks to a subsidy APPA has secured from the Department of Energy.

Following an evening of socializing, Cindy Beresh-Bryant of Continuum Education + Training motivated attendees with a talk on Making the Utility Industry Great Again with Organizational Culture. This presentation focused on making work rewarding and fulfilling, using time-tested principles from successful organizations.

T&O see page 5 please



Recent graduates of the MMUA Apprentice Lineworker Training Program were recognized at the meeting. Pictured from left to right are: Cody Raveling and James Monroe of MMUA, Madelia's Paul Helling, Princeton's Jeremy Linden, Eric Nelson of Fairfax, Princeton's Corey Zahner, Don Harbuck of Northwest Lineman College and Mike Willetts of MMUA.

Happy New Year! Austin Utilities lowers 2019 rates

AUSTIN, Minn. — The Austin Utilities Board of Commissioners Nov. 13 approved the 2019 Austin Utilities (AU) budget and related rate adjustments.

Residential and business customers can expect to see a 1.9 percent decrease in their electric costs. A major factor contributing to the electric savings is a decrease in wholesale power costs, which make up 74 percent of the electric oper-

ating budget.

"Passing on savings to customers is always good news," said AU General Manager Mark Nibaur. "We are working hard to keep costs down while maintaining our system."

Natural gas customers should not see a change in their overall costs through the year. A long-term pre-pay gas contract has provided a guaranteed dis-

count on a portion of AU's gas that will help control exposure to any volatility in the market. Natural gas purchases make up 62 percent of the gas department's operating budget.

Water rates will be adjusted with a 2.9 percent increase for residential and business customers.

The rate changes will become effective with the January 2019 utility bill.

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State regulators issue guidance for infrastructure/conservation projects

The Minnesota Department of Commerce Oct. 22 issued new regulatory guidance for claiming electric utility infrastructure (EUI) projects toward utilities' CIP energy savings requirements.

State law allows utilities to include EUI project energy savings toward CIP goals, provided the projects achieve greater efficiency than otherwise from "normal maintenance" activity.

However, "normal maintenance" is not clearly defined, resulting in uncertain savings calculations and making it difficult for utilities to assess the value of infrastructure efficiency options.

The recently-released guidance: *Determining Normal Maintenance Activities and CIP Review Process for Electric Utility Infrastructure Projects*, describes how to determine "normal maintenance" activities, how to determine an EUI project's energy use baseline, and a step-by-step process to help standardize how EUI projects are reviewed and approved for CIP energy savings credit.

"Normal maintenance" is defined differently, depending on the equipment or facility and the proposed improvements. The Guidance seeks to anticipate common issues, and reduce planning uncer-

tainty. Commerce recommends utilities submit projects for early review.

For CIP purposes, "normal maintenance" is defined as actions that do not change or alter the fundamental design or nature of the affected facility or equipment, and meet at least one of these criteria:

- Modifying existing equipment or facility
- Required to allow the facility or equipment to operate as designed
- Recommended by the equipment manufacturer as maintenance
- Performed periodically on the facility or equipment with historical documentation of

the actions for at least three maintenance cycles

• Called for under an established maintenance protocol. Protocol must be documented and have been in effect for at least one quarter of the expected lifetime of the equipment prior to the efficiency project

• Meet the definition of maintenance as prescribed in the applicable Technical Reference Manual EUI measure. The document also attempts to define 'replacing equipment.' These definitions include:

- Actions to install new equipment that meet efficiency requirements of current

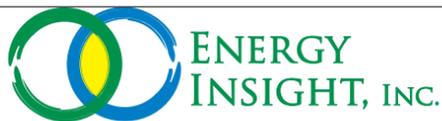
applicable codes or standards.

• Actions to replace equipment according to an established internal protocol. Protocol must be documented and have been in effect for at least one quarter of the expected lifetime of the equipment prior to the efficiency project.

• Actions to replace equipment following a historical pattern of similar replacements.

• Actions that meet the definition of the baseline case for equipment replacement as prescribed in the applicable Technical Reference Manual

CIP guidance: see facing page



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Hawley Commissioner Martodam named to MMUA Board

Don Martodam of Hawley has replaced Harold 'H' Peterson of Blooming Prairie in a policymaker's position on the MMUA Board of Directors.

Martodam has served on the Hawley Public Utilities Commission for more than 30 years and is currently presi-

dent. He has also served on the Northern Municipal Power Agency board for the past two years.



Don Martodam

manufacturing business in the Phillipines for four years.

He currently manages Martodam Holdings. He serves on the parish council and with the Hawley Lions. He is past president of the West Central Initiative board in Fergus Falls. He has served on the Rural Minnesota CEP (Concentrated Employment Program) board for over 30 years, is currently vice president and was president for 12 years. He is also a past president of the Minnesota Workforce Board.

Peterson had joined the MMUA board in 2016. Mayor of Blooming Prairie, he was defeated in the 2018 election. Peterson has been a part of the Blooming Prairie City Council since 1995, and served as mayor since 2004. He is also chair of the Minnesota Mayors Association.



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APPA urges review of FCC declaratory ruling on utility pole attachments

The American Public Power Association on Nov. 15 filed a petition for review with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit challenging a recent Federal Communications Commission (FCC) declaratory ruling and order that the FCC said could help to remove regulatory barriers that inhibit the deployment of infrastructure necessary for 5G and other advanced wireless services.

Among other things, the Association argues that the FCC's actions exceed the Commission's statutory authority and pose significant risks to safe, secure, and reliable electric utility operations.

At issue is a declaratory ruling and order adopted on September 26 and released on September 27 that may result in FCC pole attachment oversight and regulation of public power utilities, despite the explicit exemption for public power in Section 224 of the Communications Act.

Under the ruling and order, the FCC could preempt state and local laws or requirements governing access to public rights-of-way (ROW) and publicly-owned infrastructure within the ROW, including rates, terms, or conditions of pole attachment agreements, using Section 253 (related to ROW) and Section 332 (related to wireless services) of the Communications Act.

Details of ruling and order

In the decision, the Commission explains the national need for next-generation tech-

Washington Report



nology and outlines approaches to curtailing actions of cities and states that the FCC claims "threaten to limit the deployment of 5G services."

The FCC solution to state and local laws it deems "barriers" to deployment is to preempt state and local laws, rules, regulations, or agreements that do not fall within rigid limitations set forth by the FCC within the order. For communities with public power utilities, the FCC suggests that laws, regulations, or terms and conditions of agreements pertaining to public power utility pole attachments could also be preempted.

The FCC ruling and order uses two sections of the Communications Act to preempt state and local laws and requirements.

The Commission noted that Section 253 provides that "[n]o state or local statute or regulation, or other state or local legal requirement, may prohibit or have the effect of prohibiting the ability of any entity to provide any interstate or intrastate telecommunications service."

It also discussed Section 332, a provision that, among other things, prohibits states and localities from discriminating among providers of wireless services or prohibiting the provision of personal wireless services.

The Commission made it

clear that it believes Congress drafted Sections 253 and 332 broadly. The FCC offers several examples of its orders interpreting these provisions broadly in favor of expanded Commission authority.

Association argues that FCC has improperly asserted regulatory authority and jurisdiction

In its Nov. 15 petition for review, the Association told the appeals court that the FCC has "improperly asserted regulatory authority and jurisdiction over the control and use of public power utility facilities."

In addition, the Association argues that the FCC's action "exceeds the Commission's statutory authority; poses significant risks to safe, secure, and reliable electric utility operations; and interferes with the proprietary rights of public power utilities to determine the terms and compensation for use of their utility assets by private wireless carriers."

The public power trade group noted that it actively participated in all phases of the Commission's underlying proceeding, adding that its member public power utilities will be adversely impacted by the ruling and order.

The Association is seeking review of the ruling and order on the grounds that they are "contrary to law, including, but not limited to, the Constitution of the United States and the Communications Act of 1934, as amended," and arbitrary, capricious, and an abuse of discretion.

The court was further asked to "hold unlawful, vacate, enjoin, and set aside" the ruling and order.

Association filed comments with the FCC

Prior to the late September decision from the FCC, the Association filed comments and reply comments with the FCC noting the existence of the public power exemption from FCC regulation of pole attachments set forth in Section 224 of the Communications Act, as well as the distinction between local government actions that are proprietary versus those that are regulatory in nature – such as pole attachment decisions made by public power utilities.

In its order, the Commission ultimately ignored the argument regarding the public power exemption from pole attachment regulation, and it failed to provide any meaningful analysis of how Sections 253 and 332 are impacted by Section 224.

Rather, the FCC conflated

publicly-owned ROW and facilities, which may or may not be appropriately covered by Sections 253 and 332, with publicly-owned electric utility poles located in public ROW that are covered under Section 224.

For example, the Commission continuously referred to "utility poles" when discussing publicly-owned infrastructure, which the Commission said in its ruling and order is subject to preemption under Sections 253 or 332.

The FCC also alluded to Section 224 when discussing "reasonable fees," and it used the existing FCC pole attachment rate formula when determining appropriate fees for purposes of its analysis.

This past summer, the Association voiced opposition to legislation that would effectively repeal the public power exemption from FCC pole attachment regulations.

At issue was S. 3157, sponsored by Sens. John Thune, R-SD, and Brian Schatz, D-HI.

CIP guidance:

continued from facing page

EUI measure.

• Actions that result in efficiency greater than the normal maintenance threshold are considered "beyond normal maintenance" and are eligible for CIP credit. In many cases, the actual long-term historical performance of equipment will constitute an appropriate baseline, assuming the equipment has been properly maintained.

Utilities are required to determine "normal maintenance" when proposed EUI energy savings. EUI projects will be reviewed by Commerce staff.

EUI projects can increase efficiency by decreasing conversion losses, improving plant operations, and mitigating transmission and distribution losses throughout

Minnesota's electric grid. The EUI guidance provides utilities with greater clarity about how EUI efficiency projects are evaluated under CIP.

The Department had previously released *Claiming Energy Savings through Electric Utility Infrastructure Improvements and the Carry Forward Provision*. This guidance describes utility requirements for claiming energy savings from electric

utility infrastructure projects, and it outlines the use and parameters for carrying forward annual energy savings in excess of 1.5 percent to succeeding years.

Both CIP technical reference guidance documents can be accessed using the energy/utilities section of the Commerce website.

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Ceylon:

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Frontier finally installed replacement underground lines in October. That wasn't quite the end of the story, however.

When a city water project started, Frontier failed to come out and locate its cable. A contractor hit the cable, disrupting service again.

That damage has since been repaired.

City controls other utilities
Ceylon has more control

over its other utilities.

The city owns the electric system and bills its customers. Like many small municipal utilities, it relies on others to work on the electrical system. It buys power at wholesale from a nearby electric cooperative.

When it became apparent a switch and some 30-year-old underground cable needed to be replaced, the city took bids on the work. The cooperative replaced the switch and suggested the city contact Fairmont Public Utilities, which has done underground work

for a number of utilities in the area over the years, to replace the wire.

That work was scheduled for this fall, but on Sept. 20 an F0 tornado traveled down Ceylon's main street. The twister was part of a larger system that caused widespread damage in southern Minnesota. It also hit Fairmont hard. That put the wire-replacement project on hold until next construction season.

The cost of the replacement and repair is estimated at \$89,300.00. The city will use funds from certificate of deposit dedicated to electric for the repair.

The city has also recently completed a \$161,000 water main project, after hearing from its consulting engineer in September. Two blocks of troublesome 2-inch pipe was replaced with new four-inch pipe, and three new hydrants.

City population is approximately 369, down from 543 in 1980. The municipal electric utility has 234 customers.

While population has dwindled in the past three de-



Clerk/Treasurer Mary Muller also manages the municipal utility.

ades, citizens are working to breathe new life into the city.

Along with several recent community events and programs, the city council adopted a rental property ordinance. Certain property owners, including owners of rental properties, have a year to get their properties profes-

sionally inspected and make necessary repairs to bring buildings up to code.

Blighted properties will be removed. Martin County has helped the city get the program up and running. A disused grain elevator was removed two years ago, after it buckled in a storm.

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Frontier appears unlikely to reach state broadband goals

Hundreds of Minnesotans have reportedly attended the series of six public hearings, in regards to Frontier Communications service. Frontier corporate representatives repeatedly apologized for problems the company's more than 90,000 Minnesota customers have experienced. Complaints were often about unreliable phone or internet service (which is unregulated). Union employees testified there weren't enough people to do the work.

The state recently extended the investigation comment period until the end of November. An administrative law judge will file a report with the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, before it considers any action.

Frontier has reportedly been awarded more than \$27.5 million annually since 2016, through the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) 'Connect America Fund' (CAF II).

Under CAF II terms, Frontier must deploy infrastructure that provides speeds of at least 10 megabits per second (Mbps) download/1 Mbps up. Those speeds are well below the FCC's definition of broadband—at least 25 Mbps download/ 3 Mbps up.

Many believe the CAF II improvements will only doom upgraded areas to sub-standard broadband. Others argue that mobile broadband speeds of 10 Mbps are sufficient.

These broadband goals have been, and remain, the subject of some debate. Minnesota shares the current FCC guideline but has set a goal that, no later than 2026, all will have access to download speeds of at least 100 Mbps/20 Mbps upload.

It is difficult to see how some of the state's communications providers will meet that goal.

According to published reports, Frontier is in poor

financial shape. In a recent statement, Frontier said much of its recent financial loss was caused by the expense of integrating acquisitions.

While the company has recently purchased landlines in California, Texas and Florida, regulatory filings reveal its U.S. workforce is down nearly 30 percent over the last two years. Minnesota union reps say its membership has been halved in five years.

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T&O:

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Just before lunch, Mike Willetts of MMUA and Don Harbuck of Northwest Lineman College recognized people in the MMUA Apprentice Lineworker program and those involved with the Minnesota Rodeo.

The afternoon program was divided into two Manager and Crew Leader/Foreman tracks.

Beresh-Bryant kicked-off the Manager track with a look at Achieving Your Business Strategy Through Organizational Capability, Hiring and Onboarding.

That was followed by a Panel Discussion, featuring Troy Adams of Elk River Municipal Utilities; Dale Narlock of Thief River Falls Municipal Utilities; and Steve Johnson, Marshall Municipal Utilities, on Creating a Roadmap for Competitive Lineworker Wages.

This track concluded with a look at Electric Service Issues: Analysis and Developments by Steve Downer, MMUA

Marc Machacek of MMUA

started the Crew Leader/Foreman Track, with an important look at Suspension Trauma, how to keep from being injured by your safety equipment

Merrick Wells and Tim O'Brien of Sonetics Corp. presented on Team Communications in a High-Noise Environment.

Willetts previewed the APPA Safety Smart Video Project, which is being produced by MMUA, partnering with Northwest Lineman College, with the support of an APPA DEED grant.

Both tracks were topped off by the Vendor Showcase, which moved into the informative and entertaining Trade Show & Reception.

Thursday morning's programming opened with a look at lessons learned from a power plant fire and its aftermath, by Paul Twite, Delano Municipal Utilities and Tom Ewert, MMUA.

Sally Anne McShane, of the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission's Consumer Affairs Office, discussed the Minnesota Cold Weather Rule and best practices when applying the Rule.

MMUA staff updated the



The classroom portion of the conference featured a number of general sessions and breakout sessions on Wednesday afternoon. Here, Mike Willetts gets ready to address the attendees during the Thursday general session.



Shannon Roering and Zach Blonigen of Grove City visited at the trade show with Brett Nelson (center) and Cory Kiemele of Energy Product Sales.



Don Edgar of Minnkota Sales (right) demonstrated a product for Marty Meixell of Fairmont Public Utilities.



Nobody goes hungry.



The greatest benefit of any MMUA meeting might well be the opportunity to talk with people from the other utilities. Here, Dave Larson of Fosston, center, talks with Kevin Berg of Hawley, while Todd Frank of Lake Park listens on.



Rob Bahneman of FS3 participated in the vendor showcase.

attendees on association happenings, before sending everybody on their way.

MMUA thanks everybody

who attended, the cities and utilities that sent them, our speakers and all the associate members who participated in

the Trade Show, sponsored breaks, and generally help make the meeting a success.

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Firstline Supervision graduates 20 from various municipals

Twenty municipal utility employees recently completed the Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association Firstline Supervision/Leadership course through Central Lakes College. Over 350 municipal employees have completed the leadership series which is offered at CLC's Brainerd campus and MMUA headquarters in Plymouth.

The utility management program was developed in 1988 and has graduates in MMUA member cities all



Graduates from the Brainerd group included, from left to right: Perry Peterson, Granite Falls; Paul Johnson, Two Harbors; Jeff Majerus, Jason Cummings, Austin; Luke Heikkila, Jim Gilbert and Blake Prince, Two Harbors; Darrin Larson, Thief River Falls.

over Minnesota. The program is a cooperative effort between MMUA and the CLC Business and Industry

Center, designed to provide the leadership skills needed in challenging times. The 68-hour course is offered in four three-day sessions over two years. Participants work with and learn from each other, trained facilitators and instructors, the internationally recognized AchieveForum leadership materials and specially created units with a utility focus.

Public works directors, finance and office managers, customer service personnel, utility superintendents, crew supervisors, parks directors, and other municipal employees from a variety of municipal departments have benefited from this highly interactive program that emphasizes core leadership skills, performance management, communication, and handling challenging situations.

Owatonna PUC appoints Warehime general manager

The Owatonna Public Utilities Commission has named Roger Warehime as its new general manager. He will replace Mark Fritsch, who will retire on December 28, 2018.

Warehime is OPU's current Director of Field Operations and has been with OPU since 2004. At OPU, he has provided expertise and leadership to implement new products for customers, improve safety, provide greater employee recognition and engagement, as well as influence important business decisions among Owatonna's largest employers.

Warehime holds a Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Minnesota, an MBA from the University of St Thomas, as well as many certifications. He also brought a wealth of experience to OPU when he started.

OPU is a municipally-owned utility providing electric, water, and natural gas services.



Above: Recent graduates from a class meeting at the MMUA office were: Wayne Ehrich, Kenyon; Steve Tiegs, Austin; Jesse Willker, Owatonna; Troy Timm, Anoka; Todd Nelson, Rochester; Richard

Hafstad and Michael Klein, Owatonna; Warren Magnus, Anoka and Dave Andrist, Willmar. Pictured at left: More recent grads include Darin Grosz, Elbow Lake; Josh Waldorf, Alexandria; and Jason Murphy, Blue Earth.



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The **Hibbing Public Utilities Commission** has adopted a framework to pare its steam heating system down to a core.

The plan is for conversions to begin Jan. 1, with the goal of finishing conversions by fall 2022.

Natural gas service will be made available to all steam customers. Residential steam conversion customers will be eligible for an HPU grant of up to \$7,000 and an additional no-interest loan up to \$4,000, to cover conversion costs.

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customers are eligible for a grant of up to \$12,500 and a no-interest loan of up to \$12,500. Loans would have a 10-year term with a property lien for security.

Actual conversion costs that exceed the total grant and interest-free loan amounts will be reviewed by HPU, after three quotes are provided. If additional funding is needed, the no-interest loan amount will be

increased up to an additional 25 percent.

The **Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (SMMPA)** has reduced its wholesale electric power rate by 4 percent, effective Feb. 1, 2019. Factors that led to the reduced rates for SMMPA's members include:

- Low, stable prices in the wholesale energy market
- Lower fuel and operating costs for the agency's main generating source—Sherco 3—along with higher sales into the market
- Higher levels of energy sales from the Fairmont and Owatonna Energy Stations
- Strong financial returns from the Agency's transmission assets.

A road contractor cut a natural gas line in **Bagley** in September, leading to a call-out of the fire department and Bagley Public Utilities crew. Local PUC crew members quickly located the leak and clamped the line, ending the leak and then made the necessary repair.

Two days after Springfield's community solar garden was installed, vandals destroyed five of the 10 panels. The **Springfield Public Utilities Commission** had planned to use the local solar plant, along with shares in two out-of-state wind farms, to help it meet the state's renewable energy objective.

A survey of local residents had shown significant support for the local solar plant, which is located adjacent to a municipal substation.

Brainerd Public Utilities was among the Minnesota municipal utilities celebrating Public Power Week in October, contributing an article to the local newspaper and serving cookies and coffee to customers. Visitors were greeted by utility staff, browsed through information displays and received important information.

According to published reports, Brightmark Energy has made a bid to purchase a large portion of the former Benson Power biomass facility. The **Benson** city council has approved a letter of intent with the San Francisco-based company, and has committed to providing the company a \$1 million loan toward purchase of the property.

The 55-MW plant formerly burned turkey litter and wood, for sale to Xcel Energy.

Meanwhile, the city continues work on a strategic plan

for investment of \$20 million coming from Xcel Energy. The money is meant to soften the economic blow from the plant closing, which was sought by Xcel.

High winds caused widespread damage in Cook County Oct. 3, with Arrowhead Electric Cooperative reporting an estimated 2,000 outages. The **Grand Marais Public Utility** crew was also busy, repairing scattered outages in the city.

In other news, the Grand Marais utility enabled the local hospital and care center to upgrade to energy-saving

LED lighting with a \$56,967 rebate.

Replacement LED lights have been purchased for **Kenyon's** community Christmas trees. Municipal utility workers will string the lights.

The **Rochester Public Utilities** voted to increase electric rates 1.9 percent and water 6 percent for 2019. The recommendation goes to the city council for its assent. If the council approves, the new rates go into effect in January.



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City administrator Busse enjoys, finds value in MMUA Leadership Academy

The MMUA Leadership Academy, according to one of its students, is living up to its billing.

Kris Busse is the Owatonna City Administrator. She is responsible for 134 full-time employees and a \$39 million

budget. She has been the lead city staff person for 11 years, and was previously Waseca city manager for 11 years.

Busse is an accomplished person. She is also busy, so she spends her time carefully. Busse heard about the Acad-

emy from Owatonna Public Utilities General Manager Mark Fritsch, whom she has a great deal of respect for. Fritsch, who led Xcel Energy's internal staff college before joining OPU, had a hand in putting the Academy together. When Fritsch recommended the program to Busse, she considered it carefully.

Continuous improvement is something she seeks for herself, and looks for in others. The Leadership Academy has been a real help in that ongoing process.

Busse is applying the material, as it turns out, in both professional and personal lives. That application often happens quickly.

"Sometimes the next day," she said.

The Academy seeks to offer "practical and real ways to not only help people work better as a team to achieve great results, but also understand their role as a leader and how to be a great team member."

Is the Academy accomplishing that goal?

"Absolutely" Busse said. The first term is all about team, she pointed out, which is a great place to start.

Talking about team is easy—actually developing

one can be much harder.

One of the first assignments students received was to

put together an 'accountability group,' including people in various relative positions. Busse's group includes her boss—Owatonna Mayor Tom Kuntz—Fritsch, whom is a peer in local city government, and a direct report—Public Works Director Kyle Skov—who is also in the program. This small group is asked questions after each session. Answers provide insightful feedback.

Weeks before a session, students read, perform assessments and consider thought-providing questions.

The reading assigned contains time-tested content. Busse mentioned the book 'Crucial Conversations' as a "huge benefit" to her.

When the group comes together, it discusses the materials and accountability group reports, engages in team and individual exercises, gains in-



Kris Busse

sight from speakers and set-up and starts the next session.

Each session is a building block in the process. The blocks are designed to enable students to become aware of any executive leadership blind spot, and lead them down a pathway to becoming a better leader.

Is it working?

"Oh yes, very much so," Busse said. One example that immediately came to mind for her was her group's current reading of the 'Power of Presence,' which offers a practical guide on strengthening leadership impact. One exercise she recalled involved conducting an interview, with feedback on how people are perceived. She found this to be a very instructive, helpful exercise.

Tying it all together is instructor Kent Myers.

He is "outstanding," Busse said, and provides a great combination of speaking, lecture, video, practical exercises and discussion.

"The time goes super fast," she said, and the program is "high quality."

A new group begins Feb. 2019. Contact rkelly@mmua.org for more information.

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Leadership Academy graduates first class

The MMUA Leadership Academy Nov. 28 graduated its first class of students. They include: first row, from left to right: Paul Hoeschen of Minnesota Rural Water Association, Darin Grosz of Elbow Lake, Kevin Lee of Marshall, Jerel Nelson of Staples, Joe Hedrick of Thief River Falls. Second row: Instructor Kent Meyers, Jenny Hazelton of Winthrop, Scott Grabe of Henning, Kyle Skov of Owatonna, Lisa Fischer and Marcy

Douglas of MRES, Nate Zimmerman of Janesville, Jack Kegel of MMUA. Back row: Mike Willetts of MMUA, Theresa Slominski of Elk River, Paul Twite of Delano, Crystal Johnson of Granite Falls, Brian Jacobson of Thief River Falls, Raoul Blackman of St. Peter, Jeff Larson of Marshall, Scott Magnuson of Brainerd

MMUA Tom Bovitz Memorial Scholarship Award essay contest open to your high school seniors

The MMUA Tom Bovitz Memorial Scholarship Award has \$5,000 for high school seniors.

This program was created as a public relations tool to increase the awareness of public power and create goodwill in your city for your utility. Our fund is split into four

prizes and awarded to essay contest winners who plan to attend a post-secondary educational institution.

MMUA provides information for members to forward to their local high schools—public and private.

The local governing body of the utility (or its designee)

picks a local winner. Every MMUA member may then enter the one local essay contest winner to the state contest. The deadline for having utilities forward local winners to MMUA is April 16, 2019. Local deadlines will need to be set earlier, to allow the local

governing board (or its designee) time to review the entries. Many members, with necessary local political support, award their own scholarships locally to encourage participation.

A group of MMUA members will select the first, sec-

ond, third and fourth place winners statewide. MMUA will announce the winners by mid-May.

Please contact Steve at sd-owner@mmua.org if you have any questions or comments. Thank you for helping make this program a success.

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Municipal entities and related associations that are challenging the Federal Communications Commission's decision to preempt local control of attachments to streetlight poles and similar municipal property in the public right of way (ROW) filed a motion to move the case from Denver's 10th Circuit to San Francisco's Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

The FCC is intent on removing barriers to the deployment of small cells and other 5G communications network equipment. According to many, the rules heavily favor wireless providers by severely limiting the role of local governments in regulating ROW.

Dairyland Power Cooperative and Minnesota Power (MP) have proposed the \$700 million Nemadji Trail Energy Center, a 550-MW natural gas-fired plant in Superior, Wisc.

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) Oct. 29 overruled an administrative law judge's recommendation and approved, on a 3-2 vote, MP's involvement in the project. The company argued it would support its expanding renewable energy production and help it provide 44 percent renewable energy by 2025.

Opponents, including large industrial customers, said the \$350 million plant was not needed, was expensive and would contribute to climate change.

Plans call for the plant to be operational by 2025. The project awaits Wisconsin regulatory approval.

The Minnesota Departments of Commerce, Health and the Pollution Control Agency Oct. 31 wrote the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, to express concerns about EPA's proposed Emission Guidelines for Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Existing Electric Utility Generating Units, etc., published in the Aug. 31 Federal Register.

The Minnesota agencies said the EPA proposal "would require massive investment of state agency and regulated party resources while achieving little or no greenhouse gas reductions," and could encourage investment to extend the useful life of coal-fired power plants.

The state agencies said

continued on facing page:

they were “greatly disappointed” in the EPA process used to develop the rule, as it had not adequately consulted with states, and is providing insufficient time for review.

A subsidiary of NextEra Energy Resources—Lake Benton II—plans to remove 137 existing wind turbines and replace them with 44 newer, larger machines that will produce the same amount of electricity—slightly more than 100 megawatts (MW).

Decommissioning is to begin early 2019, with the project to be complete by the end of the year. The existing towers have been operational since 2000. Power is sold to Xcel.

Work began earlier this fall to remove 17 wind turbines, operational since 1999, south of Woodstock, in Pipestone County. Four new turbines are to be built on the site. Energy output is to remain approximately nine MW. Earlier plans for a one MW solar array on the site have been dropped.

The wind plant is owned by ConEdison Development, which acquired its previous owner—Juhl Energy—in January 2017.

Dodge County Wind, a subsidiary of NextEra, has proposed a 62-turbine, 170 MW project, including a 23-mile, 345,000 volt transmission line. State regulatory agencies in late October held a public hearing on the project in Owatonna. Comments were mixed.

The Freeborn County board has approved a solar energy plant on 10 acres near Hartland. The installation will be owned by U.S. Solar. Output will be sold to Xcel Energy.

Xcel has announced plans to invest more than \$25 million in electric vehicle programs and infrastructure. The plan focuses on home and public charging and fleet operations.

Xcel plans to provide the infrastructure for the first eight Metro Transit electric buses. It is also considering 200 charging ports for the State of Minnesota and 90 ports for the City of Minneapolis.

The MPUC Oct. 11 approved additional incentives to take solar power for Xcel Energy customers.

The legislature mandated a ‘solar garden’ program in 2014, aimed at making solar

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available to those who didn't want to put solar panels on their property. There are now 134 solar gardens in the state. Residential customers, however, take only about 10 percent of the solar garden-supplied electricity.

Residential customer bill credits based on the average retail rate were replaced with a ‘value of solar’ rate. That rate, however, turns out to be less than the average retail rate. So, the MPUC adopted an additional 1.5 cent per kilowatt-hour incentive, for the next two years only.

The proposal was opposed by the attorney general's office, which argued the subsidy is borne by other customers. The total subsidy for Xcel customers in 2019 is expected to be \$170 million, or 4 to 5 percent of the average residential bill, with the MPUC's recent action comprising a small part.

The number of customers participating in retail choice programs peaked at 17.2 million customers (13 percent of total residential customers) in 2014 and has since declined, reaching 16.2 million customers (12 percent of the national total) in 2016 and 16.7 million customers (13 percent of the national total)

in 2017, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) reported on Nov. 8.

EIA noted that 13 states and the District of Columbia have active, statewide residential retail choice programs.

Texas, with the largest number of participants, has a mandatory program. Ohio has the second-highest number of residential retail choice customers, followed by Illinois and Massachusetts.

Four other states — Michigan, Nevada, Oregon, and Virginia — each have a form of limited retail choice that is mostly available to non-residential customers, the report noted.

In Texas, the retail choice program is mandatory under state law in the part of the state operated by the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT). Retail customers in ERCOT, which covered 87 percent of residential customers in the state in 2017, must either choose a competitive supplier or be assigned one.

For a full and complete list of current job openings, for sale and wanted items, see the News/Classifieds section at www.mmua.org

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Associate Member News

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Primary contact is Merrick Wells, Midwest regional sales manager. He is located in Wauwatosa, Wisc., and can be reached at 414-861-

8887 or email merrick.wells@soneticscorp.com

Corporate office is located in Portland, Ore. Check the company out on the internet at www.soneticscorp.com

Gopher State One Call (GSOC) is the one-call notification system established to act as a communication link between underground facility operators, homeowners and excavators in Minnesota. GSOC collects information from anyone planning to excavate and transmits this information to facility operators who may have underground facilities near the excavation site.

Primary contact is Estelle Hickman, senior marketing specialist. She can be reached at 952-500-3876 or email her at estellehickman@gopherstateonecall.org.

Corporate office is located at 1110 Centre Pointe Curve Suite 100, Mendota Heights, MN 55120. Main line is 651-454-0002 or 1-800-252-1166.

MMUA offers variety of upcoming meeting, training opportunities

The next few months will see MMUA offer a wide variety of meeting and training opportunities. These include:

Legislative Conference

Jan. 29-30

DoubleTree Hotel, St. Paul

Politics influences the environment in which municipal utilities operate. Show up in St. Paul and help make that environment as friendly as possible!

MMUA room block closes Dec. 28. Registration deadline is Jan. 9!

Meter School and Pre-Conference

Feb. 13-15; Pre-Conference Feb. 12-13

MMUA Training Center, Marshall

The Meter School is an annual educational opportunity offering valuable technical training and hands-on work with electric metering equipment.

To ensure an optimal educational experience, participants select their preferred class level—Basic/Intermediate or Advanced.

A Pre-Conference is also held in conjunction with the School, which is an ideal refresher course on basic metering or introductory course for those with little metering experience. For maximum benefit, consider registering for both the Pre-Conference and Meter School.

Lineworker Rodeo Clinic

Feb. 27-28

MMUA Training Center, Marshall

Members of MMUA can attend this complementary training clinic to help you prepare for the 2019 Public Power Lineworkers Rodeo in Colorado Springs, Colorado, or the 3rd annual Minnesota Lineworkers Rodeo in September in Marshall. Come and talk with Rodeo veterans and practice events in our indoor training facility.

For additional meeting and training opportunities, see the Events > Calendar page at www.mmua.org



2019 Meeting & Training Center Calendar



Legislative Conference

January 29-30

Double Tree Hotel, St. Paul

Meter School & Pre-Conference

February 12-15

MMUA Training Center, Marshall

APPA Legislative Rally

February 25-27

Washington, D.C.

Lineworker Rodeo Clinic

February 27-28

MMUA Training Center, Marshall



Public Power Lineworkers Rodeo

March 30

Colorado Springs, Colo.

APPA E&O Technical Conference

March 31-April 3

Colorado Springs, Colo.

Substation School

April 16-18

Buffalo

Generation School

April 23-25

Hutchinson

Competent Person & Excavation Workshop

May 1-2

MMUA Training Center, Marshall

Underground School

May 14-17

MMUA Training Center, Marshall

Minnesota Public Power Walleye Fishing Tournament

June 1

Rush Lake, Otter Tail



Annual Summer Conference

August 19-21

Breezy Point Resort, Breezy Point

Minnesota Lineworkers Rodeo

September 10

MMUA Training Center, Marshall

Overhead School

September 10-13

MMUA Training Center, Marshall

Cross Training School

October 15-17

MMUA Training Center, Marshall



Technical & Operations Conference

December 3-5

Best Western Plus Kelly Inn, St. Cloud



Transformer School & Pre-Conference

December 10-13

MMUA Training Center, Marshall

MMUA

Leadership Academy

All at MMUA Office, Plymouth

Group B - Year 2

March 13-14

May 29-30

September 25-26

December 11-12

Group C

February 6-7

May 1-2

September 11-12

November 20-21

Firstline Supervision

Session 1

February 6-8, Brainerd

February 20-22, Plymouth

March 6-8, Plymouth

Session 2

October 9-11, Plymouth

October 23-25, Brainerd

November 13-15, Plymouth

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