

## Wilson's life intertwined with Preston power plant engine

Engine installed to power ski hill maintained by man who farms its gentle slopes

by Steve Downer

Behind every engine in a municipal power plant is a story.

The story behind unit No. 6 in the Preston Public Utilities power plant may be more unusual than most. That particular engine was installed, in part, to supply power to the Singing Hills ski area. Scott Wilson works for the utility and maintains unit No. 6. He farmed the more gentle slopes of the ski hill following its demise. He remembers the glow from the ski hill lights at night, but never did ski there.

The engine was installed as the ski hill failed.

Within five years, however, people started building houses on the hill. The water and sewer systems still serve the area. The engine enjoyed several years of regular use before Preston joined the Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (SMMPA) in 1981. Preston Public Utilities started buying power at wholesale. The local power plant languished, for a time.

When Singing Hills went bankrupt, Scott Wilson's father bought the tillable land. The family was farming it in 1974. Wilson remembers looking into the abandoned ski lodge. It was still full of skis and boots. He had to plow around the warming shack at the base of the hill. He didn't take so much



Scott Wilson maintains the Preston Public Utilities power plant, including the engine that was installed to provide power to a short-lived ski hill. Wilson's family has farmed the ski hill land for generations.

as a mitten from the lodge, but one day he slid a hay rank underneath the shack and hauled it back to the farm, where it was used as a feed grinding shed for years.

"Nobody else wanted it, so I took it," he said.

Eventually, Wilson's dad traded the former ski hill land for a parcel adjacent to

their other property.

Scott Wilson went off to school. He graduated from the diesel mechanics' course at Riverland Technical College in Austin and later earned a B.S. degree in communications from Mankato State. He farmed, and

*Ski hill: see page 5 please*

## Aitkin isn't the biggest municipal utility, but finds ways to adopt the newest technologies

Aitkin Public Utilities is proving that you don't have to be big to adopt the latest technologies.

Aitkin is located two hours north of Minneapolis astride U.S. Hwy. 169. (Residents of the area may be more inclined to note the city is located just a few miles north of Mille Lacs Lake.) The city has a population of 2,165, but with a large amount of rural service territory to the south and west the utility has 2,023 electric customers. (The large service territory is a legacy of the days when the now-demolished municipal power plant served the area.)

Despite its size, the utility is investing in new technologies when it sees a good bet that the money will be well-spent. One of the recent improvements is noticeable to sharp-eyed observers; another may be more significant but will be overlooked by most people.

Overseeing the improvements is General Manager Dave Cluff and the three-member Aitkin PUC.

A visible improvement is attractive new light fixtures and light-emitting diode (LED) street lights clustered in a 10-block area around the city's downtown, where U.S. Hwy. 169 intersects with Minn. Highways 210 and 47.

Rather than replace old street light



Aitkin Public Utilities General Manager Dave Cluff showed off a communications module for the utility's new advanced metering infrastructure system.

poles with new poles and high pressure sodium fixtures, Aitkin decided to investigate light emitting diode (LED) lamps. The benefits were too good to pass up. Once a style and manufacturer were selected, the utility sought grant funding. That proposal was unsuccessful, so the utility decided to replace what it could afford. While that amounted to a small percentage of its total

*Aitkin: see page 7 please*

## Contested case hearing ordered in Otter Tail, PKM territory dispute

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission has ordered a contested case hearing in regards to an electric utility service area complaint filed by PKM Electric Cooperative against Otter Tail Power.

PKM alleged that Otter Tail Power is in violation of the exclusive service area provisions of Minn. Stat. §§216B.37 to 216.43. The complaint alleged that Otter Tail has claimed the right to serve a new pump station that Enbridge, Inc. is constructing near Donaldson, in Kittson County, and that the site is located entirely within the exclusive service area assigned to PKM.

Otter Tail requested dismissal of the complaint, or requested the MPUC confirm the company's authority to serve the load.

The Minnesota Department of Commerce, PKM and Enbridge also filed comments.

Enbridge supported Otter Tail's request that the PKM complaint be dismissed.

*Territory: see next page please*

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## Territory: Complaint over service to long-time Otter Tail pipeline customer

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Enbridge operates seven pipelines that pass through the Donaldson Station. The additional pumps being added to the Donaldson Station are part of a company expansion project. Enbridge said that Otter Tail has provided service to Enbridge at the Donaldson Station since

1961, and that the additional pumps being installed are simply an expansion of service that has been continuous for some 54 years.

Otter Tail said this is the fourth expansion of service at the Donaldson facility since 1961 (the state's electric service territory law was established in 1974). Otter Tail said its position is supported

by statutory and MPUC orders recognizing the requirement of service to a single customer only from a single utility and by PKM's prior consent.

Otter Tail has a substation in the midst of the Enbridge operation.

Otter Tail's service to the facility began as a mutually agreed exception to mapped service areas. A 1967 statement, said Otter Tail, was signed six years after it began service to the facility and ratified the company's provision of all high-voltage electric service to the facility.

The exception agreement was not noted in the MPUC service area boundary map. Commission staff said it "cannot recommend granting PKM's complaint solely because the Commission-approved service area maps do not reflect OTP's service" to the pumping station. The electronic map was adopted as the official map "without prejudice to any utility,"

noted staff. The electronic map will be a relevant factor, however, among other factors which could help the Commission reach a decision.

PKM said Otter Tail was violating the exclusive service area provisions of state law and said it had the exclusive right to extend electric service to the Donaldson Pump Station. It said the additional Donaldson equipment is being constructed as a new stand-alone facility.

MPUC staff said the issues "go directly to the heart of regulation theory" and the record needed to be developed in regards to:

- The factual criteria outlined in Minn. Stat. §216B.42,

including but not limited to Enbridge's load requirement, and the proximity of each utility's facilities to its pumping station, for purposes of finding an exception to the exclusive service area right in Minn. Stat. §216B.40;

- Whether the Donaldson pumping station is being constructed as a stand-alone facility, or whether it is simply an expansion of existing operations at the facility; and

- Whether PKM has consented in writing to Otter Tail previously providing service to the Donaldson pumping station via a 1960 and 1967 agreement as Otter Tail asserted.



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## Moorhead Public Service to expand community solar garden effort

Because of strong community support, Moorhead Public Service (MPS) is expanding its Capture The Sun® Community Solar Garden Project. The original design of a 66 solar panel system rated at 20 kilowatts (kW) is being expanded to a 144 solar panel system rated at 44 kW. This expansion, approved by the Moorhead Public Service Commission on May 27, will allow many more of MPS' customers to participate in the project.

Each solar panel is licensed to an MPS customer for 20 years at \$480 per panel. The customer will receive an annual electric credit for the energy produced from the

panel(s) they license, less any maintenance costs. The annual electric credit is expected to be worth approximately \$40 per panel.

The Capture The Sun® Community Solar Garden will be built between Moorhead's existing wind turbines at 2200 28th Street North. If interest is strong again in 2016, MPS will consider adding to the community solar garden. The current project is expected to be complete by September 2015.

In a media release, Moorhead Public Service said it looks forward to exciting times ahead with renewable energy in Moorhead.



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#### Shane St. Clair,

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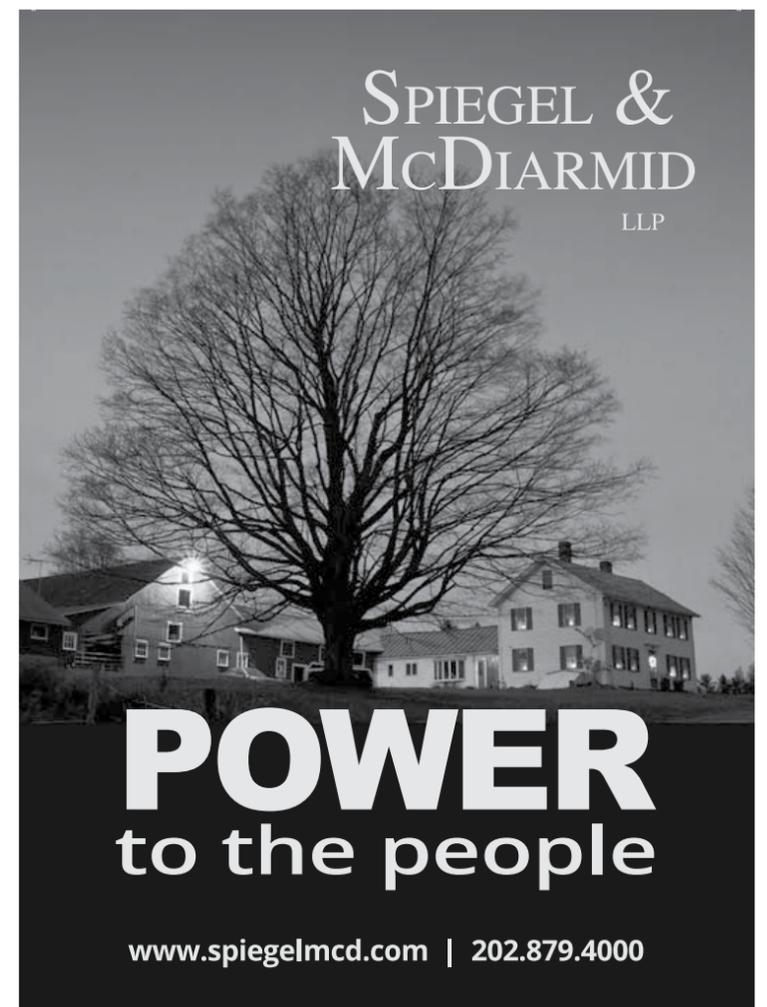
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Joseph Schmidt, jschmidt@mmua.org

Kevin Thompson, kthompson@mmua.org

Chris Trembley, ctrembley@mmua.org

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# Public power must make its voice heard as Congress hears energy legislation

The American Public Power Association is making sure that the voice of public power is heard in the halls of Congress as lawmakers start to consider a large number of energy-related proposals and hold related hearings in the Senate and House of Representatives.

Earlier this year, the House Energy and Commerce Committee unveiled a legislative framework for a comprehensive energy package. The committee, which is chaired by Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., is in the process of releasing a series of discussion drafts that address four key policy areas: modernizing infrastructure, a 21st century energy workforce, energy diplomacy, and efficiency and accountability.

In May, close to 100 legislative proposals were introduced by Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, chair of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Ranking Member Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., and other senators on the committee, to modernize America's energy policies. Murkowski encouraged intro-

## Washington Report



duction of these proposals in advance of a broad energy bill she is assembling in consultation with bipartisan committee members.

As part of the legislative process, hearings are now underway on Capitol Hill to examine specific proposals that address a number of issues of importance to public power utilities.

*APPA's Kelly calls for hydro licensing and capacity market reforms*

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on May 19 convened a hearing on proposed bipartisan energy supply legislation. At the hearing, APPA President and CEO Sue Kelly emphasized the need to reform mandatory capacity markets, to simplify and coordinate hydropower licensing, and to avoid imposing a federal renewable electricity standard.

Kelly said that the current

hydropower licensing process needs to be overhauled.

"Right now, public power and other utilities cannot increase their investment in emissions free hydropower without protracted resource agency reviews," she said. She said that APPA supports the concepts set out in S.1236, which reforms the regulatory process for licensing hydropower projects and that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission "should be the lead agency overseeing the process and it should be able to establish and enforce deadlines for other federal and state agencies involved in that process."

Kelly also used the hearing to address mandatory capacity markets in the eastern regional transmission organiza-

tions.

APPA has recommended that FERC phase out mandatory capacity constructs and replace them with voluntary, residual capacity markets.

On the same day that Kelly appeared at the Senate hearing, members of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Energy and Power held a hearing to examine a legislative "discussion draft" that addresses energy reliability and security.

APPA submitted a statement for the hearing. Among other things, APPA said that it was concerned that a section of the discussion draft could open the door for the expansion of mandatory capacity markets.

This echoes a concern that Kelly voiced in her Senate

testimony. Specifically, she said that APPA is concerned that owners of generation in regions without mandatory capacity markets could use a Senate legislative proposal "to advocate for these constructs in their RTO regions."

*APPA weighs in on House hydro, pipeline legislative proposals*

APPA also voiced support for two pieces of draft legislation that were the topic of a May 13, hearing held by the Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Energy and Power. One measure would streamline hydro licensing and relicensing, while a second bill seeks to streamline the permitting process for natural gas pipelines.

## Three MMUA Board members up for re-election

The MMUA Nominations and Awards Committee is now accepting nominations for the MMUA board of directors. There are currently no open seats on the board. Board members traditionally serve two three-year terms. Three current board members will be up for re-election for a second three-year term.

Current board members who will be up for re-election include: Elk River Municipal Utilities General Manager and MMUA President-Elect Troy Adams, Hawley Public Utilities Superintendent Kevin Berg, and City of Winthrop EDA Director Mark Erickson.

In selecting board nominees, the MMUA Nominations and Awards Committee will consider the following: personal integrity, independence and knowledge of the industry, providing a broad geographic balance on the

board representing all sizes and types of utility operations; a commitment to the promotion of municipal ownership of utilities; willingness to commit the time and energy necessary to the organization and the office; and a demonstration of interest in the affairs of the members and the association through active participation and in furtherance of the goals and purposes of the association.

Nominees must be designated representatives of member municipalities to be eligible for election. The Nominating Committee will not discriminate against age, race, sex, sexual preference or national origin in the nominating process.

Forms for submitting nominations to the MMUA board are available in the 'About' section of the MMUA website.

If you have any questions,

you may contact Troy Adams, MMUA President-Elect and Nominations and Awards Committee chairperson, at 763-441-2020. Nominations will be accepted through July 24, 2015.

## MMUA nabs St. Clair from Otter Tail Power

MMUA has hired Shane St. Clair as a regional safety coordinator/job training and safety instructor.

St. Clair, a journeyman lineman, was most recently employed by Otter Tail Power Company.



He started with the company in 1989. He was safety committee chair for the Wahpeton and Milbank divisions, built and maintained overhead and underground power lines and has experience in a variety of electric utility operations.

St. Clair served over 20 years in the South Dakota Air National Guard, retiring as a first sergeant. He managed the civil engineering unit in Sioux Falls, S.D., and also served overseas.

He started his utility career as an apprentice lineman with a South Dakota electric cooperative, and is a graduate of the power line construction and maintenance program of Mitchell Technical Institute.

St. Clair will work predominantly in the southwestern Minnesota area. Welcome aboard, Shane!

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## Truman Public Utilities maintains siren's song as it strides toward the future

Truman Public Utilities is true to its community's traditions, yet is stepping toward the future.

A visitor stopping in town for the noon meal will hear a nostalgic sound, as the municipal siren sounds. The siren has quite a history. Years ago not everyone had a time-piece. It was considered a public duty to keep things on schedule. The 'noon whistle' signaled workers to drop their tools and go to dinner. But the Truman siren had another serious function: before people carried pagers or cell phones, it was there to call firefighters to duty.

The siren was located on the water tower behind the power plant (electric service and water pumping go hand-in-hand). A staff person at the municipal power plant would carefully watch the seconds tick down and flip a switch at just the right moment.

Truman bid farewell to that landmark water tower in 1999. A new 300,000 gallon tower was built on the east side of the city. Maintaining the siren didn't cost much, so it was decided to keep it at the plant. It stands atop a lattice tower, which also serves as an attachment point for a radio antenna. The plant is no longer staffed; the whistle is now operated through a digital controller.

The siren sounds four times a day, Monday through Saturday: at 7 a.m., noon, 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. It was the source of some discussion in recent years. It appeared the sound bothered some. Others still set their clocks by it or found it a comfortable reminder of dinner time, or simply found it brought back fond memories of a simpler time.

The city surveyed its residents in regards to their preference. Seventy-five percent of respondents wanted to keep the siren.

"I have heard the whistle since I was a little girl," said one. "Just leave it alone."

"Kids may not pay attention to time, but when the whistle blows, they hear it!" noted another.

Fourteen percent asked to reduce the number of soundings, or eliminate the siren on holidays. Only 11 percent wanted to eliminate it all together.

After some official discussion, it was decided to leave well enough alone, and the siren continues to sound faithfully at the appointed times each day.

While the sounding of the siren has remained constant over the years, much has changed in Truman. One ob-



The city siren is no longer on a water tower, but remains next to the Truman Public Utilities power plant.



Office Manager Judi Davis shows a display board of utility history, including articles on the siren.

vious project, due to crews working around town, is the installation of the third phase of a new storm sewer system.

Less obvious, but perhaps no less important, are impending changes in the way the utility is managed.

Truman Public Utilities Utility Office Manager Judi Davis handles the day-to-day business while Outside

Foreman Justin Anderson oversees the systems. Anderson is now the city's only electric lineman. Truman has lost several linemen over the years to larger municipals or local contractors. The good news is that larger municipals come into Truman and help with projects as needed.

The utility has not had a superintendent for a decade,

relying instead on an experienced consultant to study major issues and make recommendations to the three-person utilities commission. That person, who has spent less time at the utility over the years, will be retiring at the end of the year.

The city's population has declined: the 2000 census listed 1,259 residents; the 2010 census 1,115. During the same time electric rates have risen, driven in large part by

skyrocketing transmission charges. The combination makes hiring new staff difficult. Truman has discussed sharing services with neighboring municipals. Those discussions may be gaining new impetus with the changing economic situation.

The community is independent-minded, and resilient. The Truman Public School District remains independent and has 500 students in grades K - 12.



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## Ski hill:

continued from front page

opened up a farm equipment repair business, working out of a shop on the home place.

In 1999, Wilson decided to close his repair shop. The next year SMMPA started hiring operators to, as Wilson puts it, “resurrect these little plants.”

He was familiar with diesels and thought about applying.

After church one summer day, he stopped at the power plant to have a look around. He remembers seeing “these old black engines,” along with

two larger World War II-vintage opposed piston (OP) engines and Unit No. 6, the newest and biggest engine.

He was hooked. “I have to be a part of this,” he remembers thinking.

He had never seen an OP before. “I’ll never figure out how to fix it,” he thought.

Putting the plant back into reliable, running order was “a great challenge,” Wilson said.

It has changed considerably since he was hired.

Two of the old, black Fairbanks Morse Model 32s were sold to people connected to the Hesper-Mabel Steam Engine Days organization. They



Two opposed-piston Fairbanks Morse units in the plant.



The Preston Public Utilities power plant. The road at the far right leads up the hill to the former ski resort.

Root River valley. It was developed by a group of investors from Austin.

According to news reports, the “resort” opened December 26, 1970. There were two ‘poma’ lifts and a tow rope, each powered by a 100-horsepower electric motor. There was a ski lodge (now part of a private home) at the top of the hill and a warming hut at the bottom. Bobsled runs, snowmobile trails, an earthen dam and frozen lake for ice skating were among the items envisioned, but never developed.

In September of 1970, the city of Preston and Preston Public Utilities installed water and sewer infrastructure (at a cost of \$30,000) to the ski hill. The water system consisted of a well, booster tank, three pumps and a 500 gallon tank. The pump was dedicated to snow making machinery.

Electric transformers were placed at the bottom and the top of the hill and lighting was provided for the five ski runs and a bunny hill.

In those days, Preston Public Utilities supplied power from its power plant. With electric load increasing, the utility planned and let bids for a large Fairbanks Morse engine, which was built and installed in 1972.

The developers, and the utility, thought the ski hill would last longer than it did. Unfortunately, the slope of the hill faces west, subjecting it to a significant amount of sunshine and shortening the ski season. That, coupled with a couple years of low snowfall, contributed to the demise of the business.

remain at the Mabel site but are not now in working condition. One of the 32s, Unit No. 1, (“a pretty robust engine,” Wilson says) remains at the Preston plant. The necessary fuel and cooling lines are no longer connected to it, but otherwise it remains in running condition.

He takes pride in his work. “No. 1 will be here as long as I am here,” he said.

The two OPs have been overhauled. A new cooling tower has been installed. The substation has been upgraded. New Prague Public Utilities operators came to Preston recently and gave Wilson a hand converting the Unit 5 OP diesel to dual fuel (able to run on diesel and natural gas).

Wilson is thankful for a job he enjoys and one that is close to home. He is grateful to SMMPA for seeing value in the local power plants and funding the necessary work to keep them viable resources. He enjoys working with the other local operators, sometimes in the other SMMPA-member plants, or having them help him in the Preston plant.

When he’s not working for the utility, Wilson helps his brother-in-law farm, including the old ski hill area and other land he has farmed all his life. The operation has grown. It used to take a month to plant less land. Now

Wilson and his brother-in-law plant 1,400 acres (owned and rented) in two weeks. Farming has “changed like crazy in 10 years,” he said, with technology and more efficient equipment.

New technology or old, Wilson knows how to use it and can keep it running.

The Singing Hills Winter Sports Area was located on a hill on the south side of the

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As part of the process of preparing a long-term strategic plan for the utility, **Rochester Public Utilities** is conducting a phone survey with over 1,200 randomly selected customers. Customers may receive a call on either a landline or cell phone. The survey questions have been designed to help RPU better understand the opinions of its customers about a variety of topics such as perceptions of the company, interactions with customer service and field service personnel, billing and alternative energy.

The survey itself will be conducted by a professional research firm.

Also in Rochester, RPU has auctioned equipment formerly used at the Silver Lake Power Plant. The auction raised \$140,000, the bulk of which came from sale of a tracked coal-handling vehicle. RPU quit burning coal at the plant in November 2013.

**Moorhead Public Service** was among those participating in the recent MMUA Tom Bovitz Memorial Scholarship Award contest. The utility offers its own contest locally and awarded three local essay scholarships and two for video entries. The utility also offers a scholarship to a high school graduate pursuing an education in electrical linework.

Terry Miller, superintendent for the **city of Adrian/Adrian Public Utilities**, is retiring as of June 30. Miller has been with the utility for 30 years.

## Around the State



Perhaps not coincidentally, **Adrian Public Utilities** this summer is completing work on an electrical improvement program that started in the 1990s. New switchgear, housed in a small building, was installed in 1994. In 1996, a project was started to place much of the overhead electric distribution system underground. In 2003, work began on purchasing and installing a new diesel generator and associated equipment.

Earlier this year, insulators were replaced on a mile of city-owned transmission line, completing the program.

An article by **Adrian Public Utilities Commissioner Dave Edwards** noted that the ice storm of 2013, when lights were out in a large portion of southwest Minnesota but the power still flowed in Adrian, was a good first test of the reliability project.

**Bill Kalis** retired May 29 after 40 years of service at **Wells Public Utilities**. The utility held an open house, with cake and coffee, for him that day at the Wells Community Center.

**Arnie Williams** retired April 30 after 37 years with the **Princeton Public Utilities Commission**. Williams performed a number of duties with the Commission, but retired as power plant supervisor. He was known to invite

those peering through the plant windows in for a tour. The plant was updated several times during his tenure.

The **Steele County Historical Society** has presented **Owatonna Public Utilities** its 2015 Preservation Award, for the project to renovate the former OPU power plant into multi-use office space, including utility offices. The restoration reused many pieces of old equipment to reflect the building's past.

The project commenced following a 2010 flood that destroyed little-used power generation equipment. Rather than relocate, the utility removed most of the generating equipment, added flood protection measures and turned the rest of the building into office and operations space. The top floor awaits a restaurant or business tenant.

In the meantime, a new power plant, with nearly double the capacity of the old one, is planned.

The **Nashwauk Public Utilities Commission** has hired a consultant to design and implement its Conservation Improvement Program. The program will consist of developing a plan that offers a variety of programs to assist residential and business customers in becoming more energy efficient.

The **Hibbing Public Utilities Commission** in late April approved the overhaul of a turbine generator in its power plant.

The **Lanesboro Golf Course** filed a petition for detaching nearly seven acres from the city, and is reportedly interested in drilling its own well while no longer taking city water service. When considering the question of whether the city agreed or not with the detachment request, it was discovered three council members were also golf course members. They abstained from the vote. The remaining two council members voted to deny the request.

The **city of Lafayette** has been exploring bringing natural gas service to the city. The city council May 11 heard presentations on the issue. A representative of **Greater Minnesota Gas (GMG)** said the company was interested and could finance, engineer, construct and manage the gas system. It would purchase gas from the **Hutchinson Utilities** pipeline located just north of the city. A representative of Hutch

Utilities also addressed the council and said the utility would be happy to sell gas to **GMG** or consider a variety of other roles in the provision of natural gas in the city.

With the lapse of an initial maintenance contract, **Willmar Municipal Utilities** staff has taken on a greater role in the maintenance of two large wind turbines owned by the utility. The technicians make weekly inspections and have performed a number of repairs, in one case aided remotely by the turbine company. That relationship is expected to

continue for the foreseeable future.

**Sempra U.S. Gas & Power**, according to press reports, has purchased the **Black Oak Getty Wind Project** from **Geronimo Energy**. **Sempra** announced the acquisition of the 78-megawatt project on April 23 and said construction would begin in spring 2016. The entire output of the wind development has reportedly been sold to the **Minnesota Municipal Power Agency** under a 20-year contract.

Terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

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## Aitkin:

continued from front page

number of street lights, it is a start. With pay-back estimated at five to seven years, further investment is very possible.

Lights include typical “cobra head” highway lights and decorative ‘historical’ poles with acorn-styled lamps.

The utility didn’t advertise the improvement but received substantial feedback on the project. Comments were positive—people liked the fixtures and the light.

The electric crew—three linemen (four counting Cluff, whose time is now largely taken up with office work) installed the poles and lights. They are being joined by the two water/wastewater employees on another ongoing project—converting all the utility’s meters to advanced metering infrastructure (AMI).

The utility allowed itself four years to complete the changeover to AMI meters, but it appears the \$750,000 project may be complete in three. The change to AMI meters started in 2013.

Signals are carried via a two-way, fixed radio frequency mesh network. The electric and water meters come from different manufacturers. The electric crew is installing the electric meters; the two-person water/wastewater crew is installing water meters and the communications modules, which work with both meters. Aitkin’s system only required one signal collector, which is mounted on a pole behind the utility headquarters. There are 10 routers in the city and another 10 in the territory outside of the city.

When all the meters are changed, the utility plans to undertake an upgrade of its load management system, which is planned to begin in 2017.

Among other benefits, the new metering will provide outage notification and allow the implementation of time of use rates, if and when that decision is made. And, of course, nobody will have to spend days walking around and reading meters.

The system is also nice for billing. Meters can all be read at the same time. Accountant Jason Dox, who oversees the billing process, was involved in the project.

“We’ve all got our niche in this,” Cluff said.

The AMI and billing systems have worked well together thus far.

“It’s a process, but when you’re done, you’re done,” Cluff said.



New LED streetlights contribute to the clean, vibrant look of the Aitkin core business district.



Aitkin Public Utilities congratulates Linda McGillis, who retired after 14 years with the utility April 24. She was a huge asset to APU and will be missed greatly by both staff and customers. Pictured are Accountant Jason Dox, McGillis and G.M. Dave Cluff.

### City, utility are growing

It is shaping up to be a busy year. The city is growing. Population was estimated at 2,087 in 2013, up 5.2 percent from 2000. The city is looking at upgrading its sewer and water systems to accommodate growth. There

have been a couple of annexations—including a small one for a commercial expansion and a 70-acre planned residential development on the north side near the airport and industrial park. A 20-lot residential subdivision is also building out.

The municipal signed an electric service territory agreement with Mille Lacs Electric Cooperative, which is headquartered in Aitkin. The 2011 agreement allows the municipal to grow to serve the newly-annexed areas.

The municipal’s rates are more than competitive and appear to have stabilized after a recent period of wholesale price volatility.

The commission includes Joel Hyytinen, Scot Sherman and city council member Keith Nentl. City clerk Tammy Pfaff attends the PUC meetings and Cluff sits on the public works committee. Dox is the PUC secretary.

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The North Branch City Council April 28 held a public hearing on the proposed North State Solar Project, which could cover up to 1,100 acres in North Branch and another 570 acres in neighboring townships. Following a formal presentation, members of the public spoke. Most, according to press reports, expressed concerns over the effects of the project on property values and long-term health.

The council approved filing formal comments to state regulators, and increased the setback of solar farms from residential properties to 500 feet.

The Monticello City Council held a special meeting April 27 to address a proposed 462-acre solar project that is in the city's orderly annexation area and is planned for future develop-

## Bits & Pieces



ment. The solar developer touted tax and utility production incentives while city staff said the property value of land from urban uses would be far greater than what a solar development would generate.

One requirement of an annexation plan is that the area be served by city sewer and water no matter what type of development occurs. The city planner said the project would displace city growth into other areas that would be difficult to serve and negatively impact the ability to finance future infrastructure.

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission held a public hearing April 27

in Marshall in regards to a site permit for a proposed 62.25 megawatt, 500-acre solar development. According to reports, most of the comments asked why prime farmland was being used, and many people brought up health concerns for families living near the project.

The Paynesville Area School Board April 14 signed a letter of intent to participate in a community solar project. The system would be owned by a Virginia company but operated by the company proposing the project. A number of things need to fall into place for the project to move forward. The developer estimated the district could save \$2.5 million over 25 years on power costs, with much of that estimate based on power costs.

Xcel Energy recently received Federal Aviation Administration approval to operate an unmanned aerial vehicle to inspect electric lines, plants and other facilities and pipelines. The company had previously used a 'drone' at its Sherco power plant to inspect the inside of a boiler.

A county judge has directed Crow Wing Power Cooperative to replace power lines serving a Pine River farm customer. The action is part of ongoing litigation between the dairy farmers and the utility, which last October was ordered to pay \$6.3 million for negligence in its response to the farmer's concerns about stray voltage.

The order requires the cooperative to install a three-phase overhead electrical distribution system to replace the current system.

CapX2020 utility partners, renewable energy advocates, state officials and legislators gathered near St. Cloud and Fargo on May 4 to celebrate the energizing of two new 345 kilovolt (kV) transmission lines, which help ensure continued reliability of electric service in the region and provide additional ways to bring renewable energy to the market, a \$1.3 billion investment.

The CapX2020 expansion has added nearly 600 miles of new transmission lines in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Xcel Energy said recently it will spend \$300 million to purchase and complete a wind farm in North Dakota under development by Geronimo Energy. Xcel had already agreed to purchase energy from the 200-megawatt industrial wind energy facility.

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) May 14 approved a certificate of need for the proposed Great Northern Transmission Line, which would run approximately 220 miles from the Canadian border near Roseau to a substation east of Grand Rapids. The project is part of a Minnesota Power plant to replace coal-generated electricity with carbon-free hydropower from Canada. Several routes are under review. The 500 kV line is expected to be in service June 2020. Estimated cost ranges from \$558 million to \$710 million.

The MPUC May 28 granted a site permit for the Aurora Solar Project proposal by Geronimo Energy, which envisions solar energy developments at 21 sites around Minnesota. The company plans to develop the sites in 2016 and sell the power to Xcel Energy. State law requires state-regulated utilities to get 1.5 percent of their electricity from solar by 2020.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency in May released a study that found agricultural and urban runoff is contributing significantly to the impairment of the state's waterways. In southern Minnesota, the report found water quality is mostly caused by agricultural runoff. The report made a number of recommendations to improve water quality, including: stream buffers, nutrient and manure management, storm water controls and in-lake treatments.

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## Gravseth saw much during time at East Grand Forks

Scott Gravseth retired May 29 after 37 years of service with East Grand Forks Water & Light. He started with the utility as a water service worker, moved to an apprentice lineman and retired as electric and water distribution superintendent.

The electric distribution system was all overhead when he started, and is all underground now.

He started the same day as line foreman Jeff Olson, June 1, 1978. He was 25 years old. He attended the University of Minnesota for a couple years (where he played baseball), had done some farm work, worked in the Louisiana oil fields, then came back home

to work for the utility.

The utility has undergone many changes during his time.

Nearly all of the original underground system has been replaced.

"That's what this business is about," he said. You keep up or get too far behind.

The original system materials weren't as good as those used today, and the old underground system was plagued by pocket gophers. Gravseth and Olson waged war on the gophers, but were hopelessly outnumbered. The devastating flood of 1997, however, decimated the local rodent population.

The spring flood was pre-

ceded by an April 5-6 blizzard and ice storm. The Red River swept aside sandbag dikes on April 18, leaving most of East Grand Forks under water. Across the river, on April 19, Grand Forks burned.

While much of the population evacuated temporarily, East Grand Forks utility people had work to do, including protecting the public water system. Gravseth remembers not having a day off until July 4. The flood-related work stretched over a decade, as a permanent dike was constructed to help avert future disasters.

Gravseth remains thankful to all the municipal utility crews that provided mutual



Scott Gravseth started with the utility as a water service worker and retired as water and electric distribution superintendent.

aid, and for MMUA's help in coordinating efforts.

A year later, St. Peter was devastated by a tornado, and Gravseth along with three other EGF linemen provided mutual aid assistance.

"Those stand out," he said. "It's nice to know the help is out there, and to help others as well."

In 2001, utility crews moved into a new Distribution Service Center. Gravseth managed the 14 employees there.

He was still wrapping things up as retirement approached. He laughed that he was starting to be ignored, but took satisfaction in that, because people knew their jobs and were doing them

without a lot of oversight.

He said he also tried to foster community, and encouraged people to "spread their wings a little."

Without prompting, Gravseth credited his co-workers over the years and MMUA's safety and training programs to helping him obtain the skills and knowledge needed to move into the superintendent's role.

Gravseth, 62, said East Grand Forks is a great community. He and his wife plan on spending time this summer at a family place in the Northwest Angle and travel to Alaska. They purchased a home in Arizona for the winter.

Three new associate members recently joined MMUA. They include Honeywell Smart Grid Solutions, Flaherty & Hood, P.A., and Midland GIS Solutions.

Honeywell Smart Grid Solutions has provided utilities with technologies and strategies from automated demand response and energy solutions to utility customer communications. Honeywell

### Associate News

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capacity and D.C. emergency lowering. Responses requested by e-mail to [dpawlenty@whitebearlake.org](mailto:dpawlenty@whitebearlake.org)

**Digger derrick truck**  
Mountain Lake Municipal Utilities is looking for a late model Digger Derrick truck, with a lifting capacity of 10,000-12,000 lbs. at the 10-

foot reach. If you have one for sale, call Superintendent Ron Melson at 507-427-2999, ext. 6, or 507-822-0212.

For a complete and up-to-date listing, see the 'Classifieds' section at [www.mmua.org](http://www.mmua.org)

## Minnesota sends strong contingent to Public Power Lineworkers Rodeo

The 15th Annual Public Power Lineworkers Rodeo was held May 15-16 in Sacramento, Calif. A total of 84 people from Minnesota attended the event, under the MMUA banner.

"It was an awesome turnout—the most we've had," said MMUA Director of Training and Safety Mike Willetts, who has been attending the event for 15 years as an MMUA employee.

Among the benefits of attending the event, according to those involved, are: team building; creates goodwill between the participating company and the employee; gives lineworkers an opportunity to mingle with some of the best lineworkers in the country; exposure to best practices; become a better lineman back home.

While no Minnesota individual or team finished in the top spots, the margin of difference is often down to hundredths of a second. That difference, however, is not what



Eighty-four people, the largest contingent ever from Minnesota, attended the 2015 Public Power Lineworkers Rodeo in Sacramento.

the contest is about, Willetts said.

"It is all about doing it right," Willetts said. "Speed is the last factor."

Because the events are often performed as a team, it teaches lineworkers how to work together better, which leads to a better working atmosphere back at home.

MMUA members who attended or teams competing included Shakopee Public

Utilities, Elk River Municipal Utilities, Detroit Lakes Public Utilities, Austin Utilities, Moorhead Public Service, Brainerd Public Utilities, Rochester Public Utilities, Marshall Municipal Utilities, Willmar Municipal Utilities, Owatonna Public Utilities and the City of Chaska Electric Department. Also attending were individuals from Delano and a number of MMUA staff.

Another spur to attend this year's event is the fact the Rodeo comes to Canterbury Park in Minnesota next year—with Shakopee Public Utilities and MMUA acting as hosts.

Established in 2001 by the American Public Power Association (APPA), the Public Power Lineworkers Rodeo is where public power lineworkers come together from all over the United States and some U.S. territories

to demonstrate their skill and knowledge in the craft of linework. At the Rodeo, journeyman and apprentice lineworkers compete for professional recognition, attend training courses and practice essential skills in a safe environment. Attendees also have a unique opportunity to connect with and learn from the nationwide community of lineworker professionals.

## MMUA Nominations and Awards Committee seeks individual, system recommendations

Doing an outstanding job locally is expected. So it often takes somebody from outside your community to recognize outstanding achievement.

At times, recognition of an individual is called for. These individuals can be utility employees, policymakers, or even a citizen. At other times, the utility as a whole should be recognized.

In addition, individuals outside of our cities and/or utilities often play significant roles in advancing the interests of public power. These people should also be recognized.

Those reasons, in part, are motivating factors behind the MMUA Awards and Recognition program.

The MMUA Nominations and Awards Committee and the MMUA Board of Directors have approved the following slate of awards.

While eligibility for the awards may vary somewhat, in general individuals and utilities must represent or be MMUA Regular Members. Individuals cannot receive the same award twice. Utilities can earn awards once every five years.

All nominations of MMUA's Awards and Recognition Program will be forwarded to the MMUA Nominations and Awards Committee for their consideration. Awards will be presented at the MMUA Annual Summer Conference Aug. 19-21.

### *MMUA Honorary Lifetime Membership*

This prestigious award symbolizes a long professional life dedicated not only to the advancement of municipal utilities locally, but also for the betterment of our industry on a statewide basis.

**Eligibility:** Individuals who have concluded or are about to conclude a long and distinguished career in the municipal utility industry.

**Criteria:** Nominees should have:

- a long professional life dedicated to the achievement of excellence in the municipal utility industry;
- a strong record of involvement in MMUA and efforts on behalf of the betterment of the industry on a statewide basis.

### *Public Service Award*

This award is given to a state or federal elected or appointed official who has been a strong supporter of MMUA and its members.

**Eligibility:** Any publicly elected or appointed official at the local, national or state level whose activities have advanced the objectives of public power.

**Criteria:** Nominees should have:

- made substantial contributions to public power;
- made contributions with lasting impact.

### *Community Service Award*

This award is given to an individual who has performed

long and well in support of a municipal utility at the local level.

**Eligibility:** An individual who has a long record of service to an MMUA member utility.

**Criteria:** An individual who has performed long and well at the local level, but who may not have the level of involvement with MMUA to merit a lifetime membership.

### *Distinguished Service Award*

This award is given to individuals who perform outstanding service in support of the association and its goals.

**Eligibility:** Individuals who demonstrate leadership on various issues.

**Criteria:** Performance of outstanding service in support of the association or its goals.

### *Rising Star Award*

This award is presented to an up-and-coming person associated with municipal utilities.

### *System Innovation Award*

This award is given to a utility that has demonstrated leadership and innovation in customer service, energy efficiency or renewables, technology, or other areas.

**Eligibility:** The utility must be an MMUA regular member system.

**Criteria:** Nominees should have achievement or sus-

tained performance that:

- was widely recognized in the public power field;
- served to enhance public power's prestige;
- improved service to their communities;
- represented an earnest, coordinated effort on the part of the system.

Nomination forms for each award are available in the 'About' section of the MMUA website. Nominations must be received by July 24, 2015.

Please submit nomination forms to MMUA via fax at 763-551-0459, mail to 3025 Harbor Lane N., Suite 400 Plymouth, MN 55447. Nominations may also be emailed to [tneddermeyer@mmua.org](mailto:tneddermeyer@mmua.org)

**Save the date!**

**MMUA Annual Summer Conference**

**August 17-19**

**Breezy Point Resort**

**Watch your inbox for program and registration details!**