

# THE RESOURCE

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photo by Bruce Westergaard

Participants in the MMUA Underground School, along with instructors, vendors and others involved paused for a group picture on the school's last day.

## MMUA training roars back to more nearly 'normal' at Underground School



Brad Olson of Brainerd Public Utilities was an instructor.

MMUA's hands-on training schedule roared back to normal May 11-14 with our annual Underground School. Sixty attendees to the school—held in conjunction with the Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) and American Public Power Association (APPA)—came from 31 municipals and three cooperatives in Minnesota, the Dakotas and Wisconsin.

Most participants to the School—held at the MMUA Training Field in Marshall—worked through a rotation of four real-world, hands-on tasks.

The school also included general sessions on its first and last days.

Our Multi-Session classes and instructors included:

- Troubleshooting Primary Outages & Implementing Switching Procedures: Brad Olson, Brainerd Public Utilities; Scott Thoreson, Elk River Municipal Utilities.

- Directional Drill Operations: Tony Mead and Nate Janssen of Marshall Municipal Utilities; Kevin Kollos, Wyatt Peiffer and Mark Chicoine, Ditch Witch of Minnesota & Iowa; Chris Conrad, RDO Vermeer.

- Troubleshooting Secondary: Rob

*Underground: see page 8 please*

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**Inside  
Stories**

## Oakes retires after four decades of greeting Madelia's customers

*Editor's note: The unsung heroes of any utility are the office workers. Here is a look at one such municipal utility employee, who dedicated much of her working life to the success of a local utility.*

by Michelle Van Hee  
Madelia Times Messenger

For nearly four decades Barb Oakes has been greeting customers in the front office of Madelia Municipal Light & Power (MMLP), and she has loved every minute of it.

"It is very stable here and everyone stays long-term," Oakes said. "This has been a great place to work. I am very grate-

ful." Of all the employees currently at MMLP, she has been there the longest. She has had three great managers to work for: Steve Moses, then Jim Maras and now Chris Trembley.

Working with a lot of the same people for a long time has been amazing. However, as of Friday, May 14, Barb is on to a new venture called retirement.

This career that has been such a huge part of her life began in 1984 as a part-time position. Barb graduated from Madelia High School in 1979; she worked at a local bank and at MMLP for a while. In 1986, the job at MMLP became a full-time



Barb Oakes

position and Oakes has never looked back.

At that time, the billing, accounting, payroll and financials

were all done by hand. And, she was the only office employee except for the manager.

Char Sellner was eventually hired to work in the office as well, and she and Barb have been a great team.

Other parts of the job have evolved, as well as how the light plant operates in general. They have gone from reading meters manually to today's method of electronic reading.

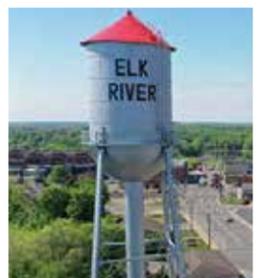
Progress is inevitable and can be great; however, all those changes have come with some

*Oakes: see back page please*

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**Elk River's  
First Watertower  
Now a Landmark**  
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**Detroit Lakes  
Dedicates New  
Wastewater Plant**  
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## Elbow Lake's experience shows Public Power proponents got it right

by Steve Downer

Can a small municipal electric utility still benefit the city it serves in this high-tech day and age?

The answer is 'Yes.'

Consider Elbow Lake Municipal Power, with 730 customers. The Elbow Lake Power Commission is a vital part of the city government and a big part of the city's success.

The utility is governed by a three-person utilities commission. While finances are kept

separate, the commission and its staff work closely with the city.

The municipal infrastructure has been substantially rebuilt during the 36-year service of City Administrator Jeff Holsen, and that process continues.

The city April 16 received a Minnesota Public Facilities Authority (PFA) Award of nearly \$5.3 million, for construction of a new drinking water treatment plant and associated wa-



Elbow Lake Electric Superintendent Darin Grosz.

termain. The award money is split into loan of \$3.4 million (20 years at 1.0 percent) and a grant of approximately \$1.9 million.

Survey work for the new water plant is complete. The city has purchased site land from Prairie Ridge Hospital and Health Services. The city has a long history of support for the hospital, dating when it was the municipal hospital in 1961.

*Elbow Lake: see page 7*

## CenterPoint's initial price-spike cost recovery proposal delayed at MPUC

*Editor's note: The following article first appeared in MMUA's May eSOURCE electronic newsletter. If you are a member and would like to receive the eSOURCE in your inbox, please request through an email to [rkelly@mmua.org](mailto:rkelly@mmua.org)*

by Steve Downer

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) May 13 denied a CenterPoint Energy petition to recover an estimated \$500 million in additional gas costs related to February widespread cold weather. The company had proposed to recover these costs over a two-year period starting on May 1, 2021 or as soon as possible.

CenterPoint said its total gas costs during the February gas market price spike represents approximately 156 percent of the company's \$321 million total gas costs during the entire prior gas year. The company said that invoices for the February "Market Event" natural gas purchases were scheduled to start coming due in March 2021.

In its petition, CenterPoint said that, to mitigate the impacts of this event on ratepayers and to ensure the continued financial health of the company, the Commission should authorize recovery of costs.

The MPUC's denial is not the end of the matter, however.

The Commission did order an expedited comment period on a number of issues, including whether or not it should eventually approve recovery of the February Market Event gas costs through a separate surcharge, as proposed by the company, or through an existing annual true-up mechanism.

In its petition, CenterPoint explained that, beginning Friday, February 12, 2021, daily spot prices surged to all-time record highs. The price spike, said the company, resulted from a combination of significant disruptions in natural gas supply combined with a sharp rise in natural gas demand – all due to arctic cold

temperatures across much of the country.

Prices at delivery points to Minnesota increased dramatically to as much as \$231 per dekatherm (Dth) in comparison to the forecasted February weighted average cost of gas at \$3.06 per Dth. The price spike impact was amplified by the fact that, to cover demand over the four-day President's Day holiday weekend, CenterPoint had to make all necessary gas purchases on Friday, February 12. Heading into the weekend, forecasts for CenterPoint's service territory included wind chills projected to range from 30 to 50 degrees below zero Fahrenheit.

Utilizing the existing annual automatic adjustment (AAA) true-up mechanism to recover these costs would result in dramatic rate increases at a time when many customers are already struggling economically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. CenterPoint requested cost recovery approval through a separate

tracker and tariffed rates.

The company proposed to track the final actual costs for natural gas commodity purchases as supplier invoices are paid or invoice disputes are resolved, along with associated financing costs, and payments received from customers. The February Market Event costs will be separated from the normal AAA true-up adjustment which, excluding these costs, would continue as normal.

During the February Market Event, CenterPoint said its gas supply plan, including hedged gas supplies, storage, and peak shaving, provided considerable protection against extreme market conditions. Additionally, the company, as planned, made spot purchases during the February Market Event to meet increased demand.

CenterPoint requested that the Commission take quick action on the company's petition, so that recovery can begin in a way that minimizes adverse customer impacts. CenterPoint noted that, if no action is taken and recovery is made (volumetrically over 12 months) through the normal adjustment process, residential customers would see an average increase of \$68 in their January bills – a 60 percent increase.

The Office of the Attorney General stated that it did not yet know whether CenterPoint acted prudently when natural gas prices rose because it is unclear what

mitigation steps the company took.

The Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources said an investigation of the matter was underway. CenterPoint is therefore requesting to begin recovering costs prior to a determination on the prudence of those costs.

The MPUC handled a similar request from Great Plains in a like manner. The Great Plains request was for approximately \$11 million. According to Great Plains, this amounts to \$310 for the average residential customer, which the company sought to spread out over 28 months.

The MPUC did not discuss regulatory treatment for Minnesota's other investor-owned gas utilities at the May 13 meeting.

Xcel is estimating the impact for its Minnesota jurisdictional customers to be approximately \$215 million or approximately \$270 per residential customer. Xcel proposed to begin recovering these costs in September and, according to regulatory documents, has requested a rule variance to recover these costs over a 24-month rather than 12-month period.

MERC estimated the impact on a typical residential customer will be approximately \$225 - \$250. MERC is proposing to begin recovering these costs in September over a 12-month period as part of its annual true-up filing.



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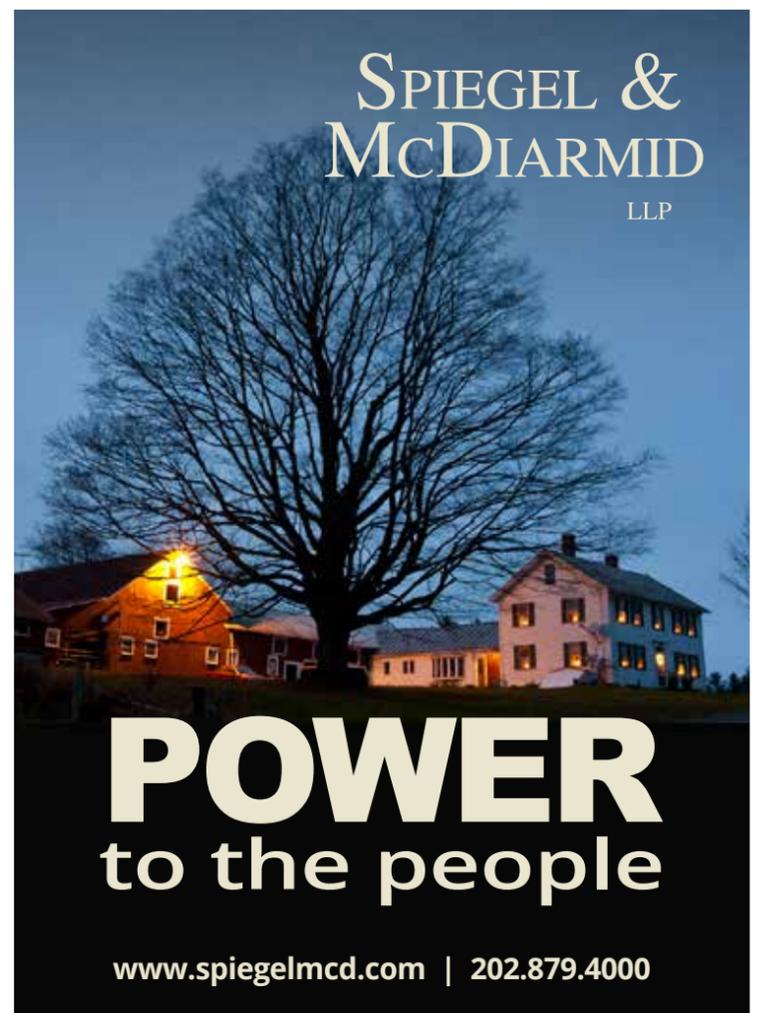
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## Biden administration unveils new greenhouse gas emissions reduction target

by Paul Ciampoli

News Director, American Public Power Association

President Joseph Biden in April announced a new target for the U.S. to achieve a 50 to 52 percent reduction from 2005 levels in economy-wide net greenhouse gas emissions in 2030.

The announcement was made during the Leaders Summit on Climate that was hosted by Biden and included 40 world leaders and took place over two days with eight sessions.

“America’s 2030 target picks up the pace of emis-

### Washington Report

sions reductions in the United States, compared to historical levels, while supporting President Biden’s existing goals to create a carbon pollution-free power sector by 2035 and net zero emissions economy by no later than 2050,” a White House fact sheet related to the announcement said.

Earlier this year, Biden directed the U.S. to rejoin the Paris Agreement. As part of

re-entering the Paris Agreement, he also launched a whole-of-government process, organized through his National Climate Task Force, to establish the new 2030 emissions target – known as the “nationally determined contribution (NDC), a formal submission to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The April 22 announcement was the product of this government-wide assessment.

The Biden administration has not provided a detailed

plan on how the overall goal will be met. It seems clear that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will pursue it using the legal authority it has under the Clean Air Act (CAA) and other statutes, but emission reductions are also premised on funding contained in previously announced infrastructure plans.

At present, there are enforceable GHG standards for new fossil fuel-fired electric generating units (EGUs), but it is unclear how the administration will proceed following the vacatur of the Affordable Clean Energy Rule by the

U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit.

While the D.C. Circuit vacated both the ACE Rule and EPA’s repeal of the Clean Power Plan, upon request, the court issued a partial mandate to stay the vacatur of the Clean Power Plan until EPA can engage in a new rulemaking.

Also unclear is what part of the contemplated 50-52 percent reduction can be achieved through existing statutes and regulation and what part is contingent upon new legislative authority and/or funding.

## Wisconsin lawsuit would limit growth of renewable resources on Midwest grid

Opposition to any fossil-fueled electric generation is blocking increased use of renewable energy, in a case being heard in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin.

The Environmental Law & Policy Center and allied conservation groups Feb. 10 filed a lawsuit against the Rural Utilities Service for violating the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) by allegedly failing to sufficiently consider reasonable alternatives to the project, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for violating the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act when the agencies approved the Cardinal-Hickory Creek high-voltage transmission line.

The 102-mile, \$492 million Cardinal-Hickory Creek project, is planned to cross the protected Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge between northern Iowa and southwestern Wisconsin.

The 345,000 volt (kV) electric transmission line is a joint venture of American Transmission Company, ITC Midwest and Dairyland Power Cooperative.

The proposed route plan includes 14 towers to cross a 260-foot-wide corridor through a river bottom refuge in Iowa to a substation located at the retired coal-fired Nelson Dewey Generating Station north of Cassville, Wisc.

Affected would be about 39 acres of the 240,000-acre Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

The route has been approved by both Iowa and Wisconsin state regulators.

It is the final segment of a 17-piece multi-value project approved by the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO). The regional transmission organization

found the project will reduce congestion of the transmission system and provide energy cost savings.

The utilities, in a joint statement issued May 6, said there are presently 45 generators, with a combined capacity of 7,909 MW, that are dependent on this project, and that 42 of these generators use renewable fuel sources.

These generators are located in Iowa, Wisconsin, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota.

Supporters say the line could enable delivery of 50 percent more wind and solar energy.

Opponents cite the rare scenic nature of the area being crossed and argue energy alternatives would obviate

the need for the transmission line.

The utilities May 6 said:

- The lawsuits may result in a delay in delivering cost-effective, renewable energy to Wisconsin and throughout the Upper Midwest.

- A project delay would slow progress toward meeting

decarbonization goals of governments, corporations and other organizations.

- A project delay increases risks of compromised grid reliability and resilience.

- A project delay potentially increases project costs to ratepayers.

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Scott Dietz, planning and operations manager, retired in May after 46 years with ALP Utilities (Alexandria). The utility held a well-attended May 6 open house in his honor. In addition to his stellar local service, Dietz was involved with MMUA in a number of ways, including being the leader of the Annual Summer Conference bike ride.



Scott Dietz

Fitch Ratings has upgraded ALP Utilities bond rating on the Alexandria municipal utility's electric revenue bonds from A+ to AA- and revised its Rating Outlook from Stable to Posi-

tive. Fitch wrote "The rating upgrade . . . reflects ALP's very strong financial profile,

## Around the State

which continues to be bolstered by the utility's very low leverage, sound operating cash flow, and robust liquidity metrics."

The analysis also considered the utility's proportionate share of borrowing at Western Minnesota Municipal Power Agency and Missouri River Energy Services. ALP's long-term contracts with Western Area Power Administration and MRES provide the utility with low-cost and diversified power supply.

Rochester Public Utilities (RPU) partnered with local businesses and the City of Rochester to offer a free Arbor Day tree giveaway April 30.

Over 800 burr oak seedlings were available for giveaway.

It was a drive-thru event at a local park, starting with a proclamation from Mayor Kim Norton at 11 and ending at 1 p.m. Staff from the sponsor organizations and the city handed out the seedlings.

RPU usually hosts an annual Arbor Day Celebration, but due to Covid-19 restrictions and to ensure safety for RPU staff, sponsor staff, and the community, the celebration event was canceled this year.

Austin Utilities (AU) was recently awarded the 2021 Best Places to Work in Southeast Minnesota in the Mid-Size Employer range (50-150 people) by the Workforce Development Inc. This is the fourth year in a row the organization has won the award.

In addition to a good benefit package, active employee committees for safety, wellness, and community engagement have helped earn the award.

AU completed a 40-question survey that allowed its employment practices to be analyzed by a consulting firm. The data included: turnover, rate of growth, promotion rates, employee evaluations and feedback, percentage of employees injured, diversity of management, benefits offered, training expenditures, paid days off and increase in pay.

The North Branch Water & Light Commission held an emergency meeting May 10. According to reports, the Commission approved a motion to explore the opportu-

nity to contract services with the City of North Branch. The goal was said to be to reduce expenses and create savings for customers. The utility has been operating recently with reduced office staff.

A subcommittee was formed to explore possibilities. The next day, the city council voted to add two of its members to the subcommittee.

A referendum to abolish the commission failed in 2016.

The Baxter city council May 18 approved a 20-year

wastewater lift station maintenance plan.

A new medical campus in Redwood Falls recently cashed in on its commitment to sustainability, collecting \$152,688 in rebates for installing energy-efficient equipment that will provide more than \$62,000 in annual energy savings. Redwood Falls Public Utilities and the customer worked with Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency energy services representative to garner the energy savings and rebates.

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# Elk River's first water tower marks progress, lives on as historic area landmark

*Editor's Note: Much of the material in this article originally appeared in the Elk River Star News. Other portions came from an article written by Tony Mauren of Elk River Municipal Utilities.*

**by Jim Boyle**

*Editor, Elk River Star News*

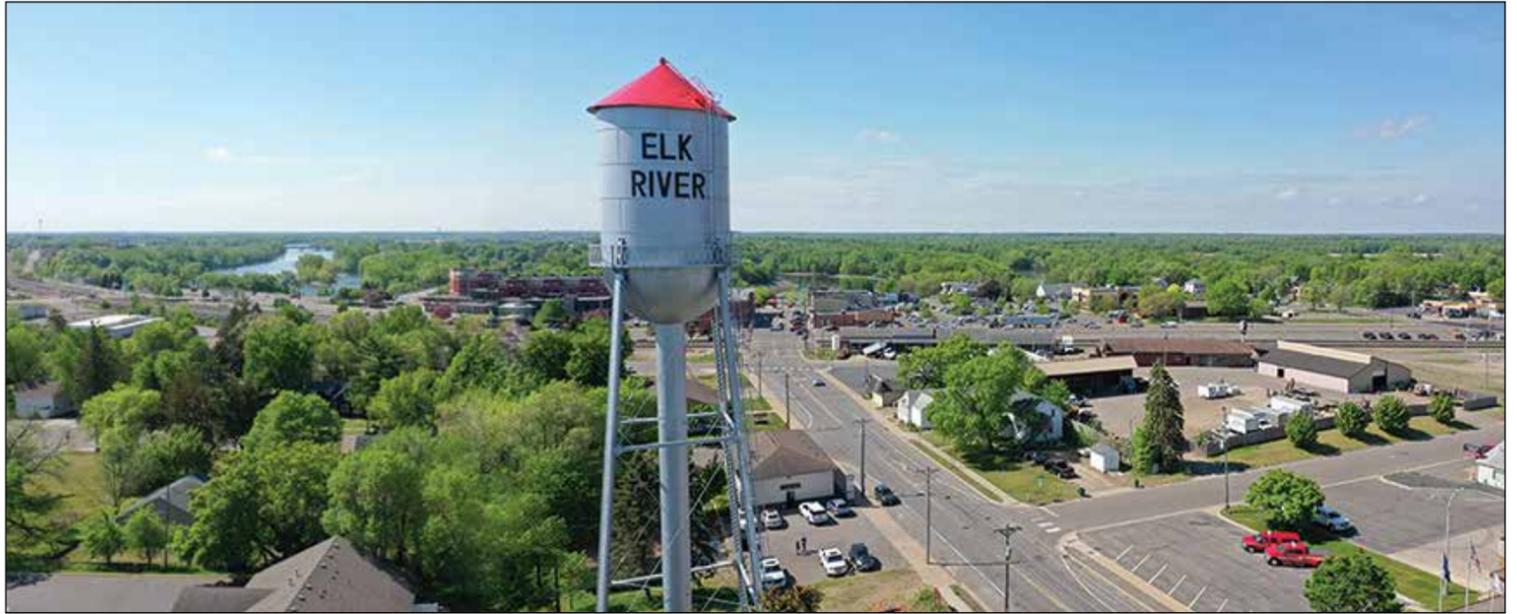
The Jackson Street Water Tower that was built to address a fiery past has just finished receiving fresh paint, which also restored an old look for the century-old tower.

The tower was nominated for the National Register of Historic Places by the city's Heritage Preservation Commission and was added to the National Register in 2012 when it was 92 years old. It turned 100 during the pandemic.

In 1920, the city's first water tower was built on top of the well that had been installed about a year earlier. The water tower, located at Jackson Avenue and Fourth Street near downtown Elk River, was built by the Minneapolis Steel and Machinery Co. as part of an effort to protect Elk River from fire.

"During the years and decades to follow, the city of Elk River and its infrastructure continued to expand and develop, forging a community that proved to be equal to the challenges of the early days of settlement," according to Tony Mauren, a member of Elk River's Heritage Preservation Commission and an Elk River Municipal Utilities employee.

"The Jackson Street Water Tower embodied the same resiliency, creativity, and com-



*photo courtesy of the City of Elk River*

The Jackson Street water tower was Elk River's first, built in 1920 on the highest point in the city. The Mississippi River is in the distance.

mitment to the future that brought Elk River out of the ashes time and again," Mauren wrote in an article he prepared with the help of the Sherburne County Historical Society as part of the commission's work to preserve history.

In his article, he reported about six major fires as they were reported in the Sherburne County *Star News*. They were:

- 1868 — The Mills and Houlton flour mill was destroyed.

- May 1887 — Several buildings including saw mills, a chair factory, flour mills, and a hotel were destroyed.

- April 1898 — A row of 13 frame buildings was destroyed.

- January 1903 — Buildings on the "Brick Block" (the northwest block of Jackson and Main) were destroyed.

- January 1911 — The "Post

Office Block" was destroyed.

- April 1915 — Buildings on Jackson and Main Street were destroyed.

In the fall of 1919 a plot of land was purchased on the north side of the train tracks for \$200.

Several weeks later, work began on Well #1, the first municipally-owned well in the city. On Christmas Day 1919 the Sherburne County *Star News* reported a steady flow of water was obtained.

In 1920, the city's first water tower was built on top of the well.

### *Progress followed water tower development*

During the years and decades to follow, the city of Elk River and its infrastructure continued to expand and develop, forging a community that proved to be equal to the challenges of the early days of settlement. As the highest point of the city, the Jackson Street Water Tower embodied the same resiliency, creativity, and commitment to the future that brought Elk River out of the ashes time and again.

The tower has not been in use for years. The Heritage Preservation Commission is credited with making it possible for the city to position itself to complete the improvements on the historic tower.

Elevation Coating, LLC, a St. Cloud-based firm, did the work over the course of six weeks. It was the oldest water tower to have been painted by the decade-old company.

The 137-foot water tower had structural damage repaired and missing items replaced. Its new look — a silver structure and tank with a red roof — was its original look.

The city received a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society for \$136,000. Other costs are being paid by

a transfer from Elk River Municipal Utilities, which had

owned the tower until very recently.

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## Detroit Lakes Public Utilities dedicates new wastewater treatment plant

The Detroit Lakes Public Utilities held an open house May 18 for its new wastewater Enhanced Effluent Quality project.

The \$33.4 million treatment facility meets one of the lowest phosphorous limits in Minnesota.

A Public Facilities Authority (PFA) funding package included an \$11.53 million grant from the Point Source Implementation Program, a \$2.24 million principal forgiveness grant from the Clean Water Revolving Fund, and a

\$3.27 million grant from the Water Infrastructure Fund.

The project also was awarded a low-interest loan of \$16.34 million from the Clean Water Revolving Fund. The 20-year, 1.099 percent interest loan will save the city \$2.68 million compared with what it would have paid on a conventional loan of the same amount.

In 2013, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) directed the city to decrease the phosphorus content of the wastewater efflu-



Michael Achterling photo, courtesy of the Detroit Lakes Tribune

Detroit Lakes Public Utility General Manager Vernell Roberts (right) led a tour during the May 18 wastewater treatment plant open house.

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ent to preserve area water quality.

An MPCA study showed phosphorus from various sources were affecting Lake St. Claire, which was placed on the impaired list.

As a result, the city was faced with a new total maximum daily load (TMDL), a regulatory term describing the maximum amount of a pollutant that a body of water can receive while still meeting water quality standards.

The city needed to reduce the phosphorous entering Lake St. Claire by 94 percent – from 1 milligram per liter to .066 milligrams per liter. This very low limit came from guidelines established at a national level by the Environmental Protection Agency.

These guidelines are currently being handled by each state individually. In Minnesota, this took the form of two key regulations.

Arriving first, in 2008, were the Lake Eutrophication Standards. Then, in 2014, the River Eutrophication Standards came into effect. Com-

bined, these standards are driving change in the wastewater treatment industry and others.

The Minnesota Court of Appeals upheld the standards.

A combination of innovative wastewater technologies and processes were implemented to reduce nutrient load to low levels, including enhanced tertiary processes coupled with biological nutrient removal.

The City of Detroit Lakes Wastewater Treatment system serves a population of 9,500 residents, along with commercial customers, with a treated average daily flow of approximately 1.3 million gallons per day. The wastewater is conveyed to the treatment facility by underground piping and 60 lift stations.

The construction team includes project engineer SEH and Rice Lake Construction Group.

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## Elbow Lake

continued from front page

Prairie Ridge moved into a new facility on Minn. Hwy. 79 in May 2014.

The electric utility has two substations. Either can carry the utility's load in the case of emergency. The newer sub is located near the hospital on the east side of the city; the other is on the west side, adjacent to where the original municipal power plant was sited. This substation was rebuilt in 2007.

Electric Superintendent Darin Grosz is one of three journeyman linemen employed by the city.

The electric crew timely serves developments around the city and has an ongoing project of putting the electrical distribution system underground, to make backyards look nice and improve an already outstanding reliability.

The utility boasts a response time to trouble of less than 10 minutes during the week and generally just as quick during the weekend. It does not charge for service calls. Rates are less than neighboring utilities.



Many of those instrumental in the formation and early operation of the Elbow Lake municipal electric system are pictured in this 1992 MMUA photograph. They include, front row, left to right: former city clerk Harlan Martinson, Gerald Walwick, former commissioner Wyman Schaffer. Back row, left to right: Don Nelson, Superintendent Ruddi Schei, and City Administrator Jeff Holsen.

Elbow Lake Municipal Power is the second youngest municipal in the state. In 1957, 77 percent of the voters approved municipalizing the electric system. Elbow Lake went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court for the right to 'wheel' federal hydropower to the city. The city then sued for triple damages and obtained a \$1.3 million settlement, which it has used as a revolving fund over the years.

Supplemental power needs, over and above the Western Area Power Administration hydro allocation, are met by the Missouri River Energy Services.

Former City Councilmember Gerald Walwick and others were instrumental in selling the concept of public power to the voters. Holsen

is an unusual administrator in that he was able to work closely with the founders of the municipal electric utility in his early days with the city.

The electric utility's list of benefits to the city is long.

The utility pays half for most equipment purchased by the city.

The utility makes many other contributions to reduce property taxes.

When time came to replace the roof on the community building the electric utility donated half the money, and it chips in a large amount for fire trucks, helps with snow removal, trims trees, helps in many ways at the municipal campground and maintains lights and other equipment at the airport.

The utility is always there when it comes to helping with a community event, whether it be to help with temporary power, a bucket truck, or ball-field lights.

The utility has made loans to the local EDA and community fund. Low-income customers have not been left out, as the utility has granted tens of thousands of dollars

over the years to West Central Community Action.

Another deal the city came out well on involved Maplewood Manor, a 16-unit apartment building. The city paid for construction with grants and ran it for 23 years. Two years ago, the building was sold to an assisted living company for \$1.3 million. The sale price reflected the city's investment in the facility over the years. The deal benefitted both parties, and that sort of arrangement has been the key to the city's success.

The city, unsatisfied with the service provided, in 1990 overbuilt the cable TV company. Elbow Lake later sold the system to the local telephone cooperative. That cooperative is now installing a fiber broadband system in Elbow Lake, with the work expected to be complete this year.

During Public Power Week of October 1992, the Elbow Lake commission provided a month of 'free' electricity. The gift cost the utility over \$75,000 and came 25 years after Elbow Lake established its municipal utility.

## Methodical approach to progress has worked well for Elbow Lake City Administrator Holsen and his team

Jeff Holsen takes a steady approach to progress.

Holsen has been the Elbow Lake clerk/administrator/treasurer since February 1985. While working with engineers and other consultants, the city has obtained \$9.9 million in grants since 1995.

That's a pretty good amount for a city of approximately 1,200.

Water, wastewater and maintenance superintendent Greg Jacobson has worked with Holsen for 30 years. That's enough time to redo Main Street twice, Jacobson said.

Holsen takes a methodical approach to progress. That is important when project costs often run into the millions and infrastructure is designed to last for decades.

Holsen has "only got one speed," said Jacobson with good humor. Electric Superin-



Jeff Holsen pointed out papers related to upcoming projects in this 2017 MMUA photo.

tendent Darin Grosz chimed in, "Not too slow, and not too fast."

That methodical approach, which has apparently been imparted to the rest of city staff, has served the community well.

Holsen certainly stays grounded.

He goes to the city shop ev-

ery day for lunch, and maybe a game of cribbage. He lets people do their jobs, is understanding and doesn't get in the middle of things.

"He's great," said Jacobson. "I don't want to work for anybody else."

Deputy Clerk Linda Olson is also part of the team. Come this September she will have been with the city 50 years.

"It's been a great run," Jacobson said of the city's team. It is obvious good working relationships are part of staff longevity.

Elbow Lake city employees have also been fortunate over the years to work with many locally-elected officials that put the good of the community over any personal ambition.

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## Underground

continued from front page

Castillo and Chad Peterson, Rochester Public Utilities.

• 600-Amp Terminations: Jeff Martinson, Austin Utilities; Jim Stephens and Jared Allen, 3M.

General Sessions topics

and instructors included:

• Cable Design, Prep and Handling, by Joel Donner of the Okonite Company.

• Best Practices for Designing a Cable Installation, by Larry Lamote of Marshall Municipal Utilities; Matt Hannafin, Upper Midwest Utility Sales and Mark Wil-



Apprentices working with MMUA Job Training and Safety and Apprenticeship Instructor James Monroe (kneeling) gathered for a group photo at the Underground School.

liams, American Polywater Corp.

• Proper Traffic Control, by Kathleen Schaefer, Minnesota LTAP.

A Mystery Event—the Transformer Change Out Challenge—was held Thursday afternoon. This offered lineworkers the opportunity

to participate in a timed event demonstrating how to safely and effectively de-energize underground cable in preparation for transformer change out.

MMUA thanks all those who attended, the utilities that sent them, and the instructors and speakers for

sharing their time and expertise.

A big thank you also goes to the utilities and companies that provided equipment & materials, including:

- American Polywater Corp.
- Austin Utilities
- Brainerd Public Utilities
- Ditch Witch of Minnesota & Iowa
- Elk River Municipal Utilities
- Marshall Municipal Utilities
- RDO Vermeer
- Rochester Public Utilities
- The Okonite Company
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Scott Thoreson of Elk River Municipal Utilities (left foreground) was an instructor on Troubleshooting Primary Outages and Switching Procedures.

## Underground School 2021



Tony Mead of Marshall Municipal Utilities (left) also served as an instructor and directed a discussion of Directional Drill Operations.



Vendors and utilities play a big role in making the Underground School a success. Ditch Witch of Minnesota and Iowa supplied two directional drill rigs and the experts to teach their proper operation and capabilities.



*photos by Steve Downer*

Jim Stephens of 3M (second from left) supplied materials and expertise for the 600-Amp Terminations work station.



A lot of information sharing goes on at each MMUA school.



Doing things right—from start to finish—is stressed for each task.

## MP to proceed with three solar energy plants using Minnesota-made panels

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission May 6 approved Minnesota Power's request to execute three affiliated interest agreements between the company and ALLETE Enterprises, Inc. related to solar energy plants proposed for Laskin, Sylvan, and Duluth.

The three projects collectively amount to approximately 21 MW of solar-generated energy and capacity. Laskin and Sylvan Solar will be developed on land already owned by MP. The projects will be owned by an ALLETE Enterprises LLC partnership. The LLC will need to have a zero-cost land lease from MP.

The Duluth Solar project will be on land leased from the City of Duluth, and the lease terms are being negotiated with city staff. Final ap-

proval and execution of the land lease are pending Duluth City Council action.

Laskin Solar will be near Hoyt Lakes, adjacent to the Laskin Energy Center; Sylvan Solar will be near MP's Sylvan hydroelectric station west of Brainerd, on the Crow Wing River; and Duluth Solar will be in northeast Duluth.

MP issued a request for proposals for the solar panels and requested domestic and Minnesota-manufactured solar equipment. MP has secured a contract with Heliene, which will supply modules for all of the projects and manufactured them at its facility in Mountain Iron.

The most significant advantage of utilizing Heliene modules, said MP, is their ability to provide bifacial modules manufactured in America,

which no other supplier was able to do. These modules result in a lower cost of energy.

The overall project cost will be approximately \$40.9 million. MP calculated that the levelized bill impact for an average residential customer is \$0.59 per month, or a rate increase of 0.73 percent.

The company explained that it "is not able to effectively utilize the federal solar investment tax credits provided by the proposed solar projects if they were wholly owned by the company even with the federal extension to 2022."

Therefore, MP will utilize an affiliate to partner with a tax equity investor to own the projects and sell the power and associated Solar Renewable Energy Credits (SRECs) to MP through a power purchase agreement. Once AL-

LETE Enterprises enters into an agreement with a tax equity investor and forms an affiliate to construct and operate the solar projects, ALLETE Enterprises' interests and obligations under the power purchase agreement will be assigned to the operating affiliate. If a tax equity investor is unable to invest in the project upon completion, MP will continue to evaluate financing options.

MP said it hoped to provide an economic boost for local communities, spread out the investment across its service

territory, and take advantage of distribution-connected projects rather than transmission-interconnected projects.

While MP described the projects as economic recovery opportunities, MPUC staff noted it has been nearly five years since the Commission required MP to procure 12 MW of additional solar by 2020, and the company has not yet met this requirement.

Site preparations are expected to occur this year and next.

## FERC summer assessment: regions face challenges

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission staff May 20 released its 2021 Summer Energy Market and Reliability Assessment.

The Assessment focuses on June through the end of September and uses preliminary North American Electric Reliability Corp. (NERC) Summer Reliability Assessment data. The final NERC Summer Reliability Assessment was scheduled to be released May 27 (after our deadline.)

All NERC Planning Regions should have enough generation available to exceed their reserve margins, but many regions would face challenges in extreme conditions. In Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT),

Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO), ISO New England (ISO-NE), and Western Electricity Coordinating Council (WECC), particularly in the California/Mexico (CAMX) subregion of WECC, extreme conditions may cause operational challenges and increasing the risk of "unserved load."

Nationally, most electric capacity additions are forecast to come from natural gas, solar, wind and battery resources during the summer. Nearly 1.7 GW of coal-fired generation capacity, largely in PJM Interconnection, MISO, and ISO-NE, and about 2.3 GW of nuclear capacity in PJM are scheduled to retire this summer.

MISO reported it does not anticipate reliability issues for the summer under normal conditions, and has additional capacity beyond the planning reserve margin to reduce expected unserved energy risks. MISO notes that it may become more challenging to meet higher demand if combined with high outages when non-firm generation and/or adequate transmission is not available, increasing the likelihood of an energy emergency. MISO's five-year average of forced generation outages are trending higher in the month of June, while July and August outage trends remain similar to 2018 and 2019. According to a MISO survey, depending on the construction/operation status of certain new resources, available capacity is expected to exceed peak load, in the range of 18.6 percent and 23.8 percent, compared to MISO's required 18 percent Planning Reserve Margin.

Nationwide, according to preliminary data from NERC, all planning regions should have enough electric capacity available to exceed their reserve margins this summer under expected conditions – with over 10 GW of electric capacity scheduled to enter operation and 4.1 GW scheduled to retire from June through September 2021.

However, extreme conditions may reduce reserve margins or limit energy imports that affected regions depend on from neighboring systems to serve increased demand or compensate for internal forced outages, causing operational challenges and increasing the risk of unserved load.



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# MISO projects adequate power supply for summer, absent extreme conditions

Though these things are no longer taken for granted, the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) projects an adequate power supply for this coming summer.

MISO made the pronouncement May 4 at a Summer Readiness Workshop, where it projected 146 gigawatts (GW) of resources to cover demand and outages for summer 2021. MISO estimated a summer coincident peak, plus transmission losses, at 122 GW. The Regional Transmission Organization noted a moderate probability for warmer than normal forecasted temperatures throughout the MISO footprint.

However, not surprisingly, a combination of both high load and high outages could drive “operational challenges.”

High points of the generation assessment were:

- Under the presumption that weather and outage conditions are typical, adequate resources are projected to be available to meet expected load this summer;

- A combination of both a high load and a high outage scenario may require declarations of emergency procedures, if there was insufficient availability of non-firm (renewable) energy resources.

The transmission limitations in the system are with-



The Midcontinent Independent System Operator stretches from northern Canada to Louisiana. It is segmented into three zones. Minnesota is in MISO North.

in the expected norms for the upcoming summer, said MISO, with no major constraints identified that do not have mitigations.

Interestingly, eight additional regional directional transfer (RDT) flow-gates not previously in MISO’s processes were found and import capability load pocket studies for four MISO load pockets are ongoing.

The workshop agenda included a look at lessons learned from last summer, generation and transmission assessments, readiness, market capacity emergency procedures and other issues.

MISO noted an increase in abnormal weather events in 2020, including hurricanes which impacted the MISO South region. MISO said lessons learned from these events include:

- MISO and members must align expectations for price formation, cost allocation, customer communication, and roles and responsibilities to support the shared goal of system reliability.

- More robust preparation for severe weather events and more sophisticated tactical annual hurricane drills will help in future support for members.

- Current software is limited in its ability to implement the needed pricing in response to events like last summer’s Hurricane Laura, requiring significant manual

work.

- Better alignment is needed between MISO’s Max Gen steps and North American Electric Reliability Corporation’s (NERC) Energy Emergency Alerts.

These findings, noted MISO, highlight the urgency to prioritize the four elements of MISO’s Response to the Reliability Imperative.

MISO is an independent, not-for-profit organization that delivers safe, cost-effective electric power across 15 U.S. states and the Canadian province of Manitoba.

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## FERC rebuffs MISO ask for Order 841 delay

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has rejected a Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) request to postpone, for the second time, implementation of a new market platform, which would eliminate barriers to electric storage resources’ participation in its wholesale power markets.

FERC said MISO “has not demonstrated potential reliability impacts that warrant further delay.”

On March 4, MISO submitted a request to further defer – from June 6, 2022, to March 1, 2025 – the effective date of previously accepted revisions to MISO’s Tariff filed in compliance with Order No. 841.

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## Citing reliability, FERC grants MISO, SPP delays in implementing new market rules

*Editor's note: The following report was prepared using the sources cited.*

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) April 9 approved, unopposed,

multiple requests to delay Order 2222 compliance filings.

On its website, the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) noted that Order 2222 addresses the in-

tegration of a high penetration of Distributed Energy Resources (DER) and leads to reliability concerns, including how to coordinate with distribution electric system operators for mutual reliability needs.

DERs are small-scale power generation or storage technologies (typically from 1 kW to 10,000 kW) that can provide an alternative to or an enhancement of the traditional electric power system. These can be located on an electric utility's distribution system, a sub-system of the utility's distribution system or behind a customer meter. They may include electric storage, intermittent renewable generation, distributed generation,

demand response, energy efficiency, thermal storage or electric vehicles and their charging equipment.

FERC granted MISO a delay until April 18, 2022. The Southwest Power Pool (SPP) was granted a delay until April 28, 2022. PJM was also granted a delay.

MISO said the delay will improve coordination with its ongoing Reliability Imperative and allow it to integrate the mandated energy, capacity and ancillary services market revisions.

DER integration will require more accurate forecast of growth by location and better modeling of reliability impacts, said MISO.

FERC Commissioner Mark

C. Christie said "The problems and complexities of compliance described in these motions is further evidence that implementing Order Nos. 2222 and 2222-A will be far more complicated, far more costly to consumers and far more burdensome to states, public and municipal power authorities, and electric cooperatives, than these orders and many of their supporters acknowledge."

In its request for extension, MISO stated that Order No. 2222 "sets forth a substantial number of complex compliance requirements concerning a wide array of technical topics . . ."

MISO described in detail how Order No. 2222 "directly impacts MISO's Reliability Imperative efforts" that are essential to maintain system reliability.

MISO also said that its resources are finite and it "must balance the expenditure of its resources to satisfy Order No. 2222 compliance requirements with its ongoing efforts to ensure long-term adequacy and system reliability through the Reliability Imperative."

Order 2222: see facing page

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## Order 2222:

*continued from facing page*

MISO also referenced the “potential for MISO’s Order No. 2222 compliance to negatively impact MISO’s fundamental responsibility to ensure the continued reliable provision of power throughout its footprint.”

SPP stated, in support of its request, that Order No. 2222 presents “substantial design complexities and challenges” that “steer [the RTO, transmission entities, market participants and distribution utilities] all into largely uncharted waters.”

SPP also said that market participants have noted that

the changes mandated by Order No. 2222 “could have significant impacts on the safety and reliability of the distribution system . . .”

MISO also recently requested a deferral for revisions to its Tariff on Energy Storage Resources (ESR). The ESR tariff is to be developed in compliance with FERC Order No. 841. FERC rejected this request (see page 11).

### *FERC touts order will usher in electric grid of the future*

On its website, FERC said Order No. 2222 will help usher in the electric grid of the future and promote competition in electric markets by removing the barriers preventing

distributed energy resources (DERs) from competing on a level playing field in the organized capacity, energy and ancillary services markets run by regional grid operators.

Regional grid operator tariffs must set a size requirement for resource aggregations that do not exceed 100 kW.

The tariffs also must address technical considerations such as:

- locational requirements for DER aggregations;
- distribution factors and bidding parameters;
- information and data requirements;
- metering and telemetry

requirements; and

• coordination among the regional grid operator, the DER aggregator, the distribution utility and the relevant retail regulatory authority.

The rule also directs the grid operators to allow DERs

that participate in one or more retail programs to participate in its wholesale markets and to provide multiple wholesale services, but to include any appropriate, narrowly designed restrictions necessary to avoid double counting.

## Nominations remain open for MMUA awards until June 30

MMUA’s Nominations and Awards Committee is accepting nominations until June 30 for MMUA awards. Forms can be downloaded from [mmua.org](http://mmua.org) at the Awards and Recognition page on the ‘About’ menu. Awards will be presented at the MMUA Summer Conference.

MMUA Awards include:

• System Innovation Award, for a utility that has demonstrated leadership and innovation in customer service, energy efficiency or renew-

ables, technology, or other areas.

• Public Service Award, given to a state, or federal elected or appointed official who has been a strong supporter of MMUA and its members.

• Distinguished Service Award, for outstanding service in support of the association and its goals.

• Community Service Award, given to an individual who has performed long and well in support of a municipal utility at the local level.

• Rising Star Award, recognizes a future leader who has demonstrated dedication to the goals and principles of municipal utilities through problem solving, creativity, and job knowledge.

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Utility Dive reported May 18 that a preliminary look at the North American Electric Reliability Corp.'s 2021 Summer Reliability Assessment shows "elevated risk" of power supply shortfalls in Texas, New England and the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, and California with "elevated risk."

Cyber security issues add another layer of risk and concern.

As part of its comments on a rate case, the Minnesota's Attorney General's office submitted testimony to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission objecting to Otter Tail Power's efforts to charge its ratepayers \$47,545 for dues it pays to the Lignite Energy Council.

The AG's office argued that the Lignite Energy Council does not benefit electric ratepayers in Minnesota, and is instead focused on promoting North Dakota's coal industry.

The cyberattack against the Colonial Pipeline system, which provides nearly half of the fuel supply for the East Coast, prompted Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) Chairman Richard Glick on May 10 to call for mandatory pipeline cybersecurity standards similar to those applicable to the electricity sector.

FERC, in coordination with the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, has established and enforced mandatory cybersecurity standards for the bulk electric system. However, there are no comparable mandatory standards for the nearly three million miles of natural gas, oil, and hazardous liquid pipelines that traverse the United States.

The U.S. Departments of Interior and Commerce May 11 announced the approval of the construction and operation of the Vineyard Wind project, the first large-scale, offshore wind project in the U.S.

The 800-megawatt Vineyard Wind energy project, comprised of 84 or fewer turbines, will be located approximately 12 nautical miles offshore Martha's Vineyard and 12 nautical miles offshore Nantucket.

Environmental reviews of two other offshore wind projects are reportedly under-

see facing page please

way, with additional leasing opportunities being pursued in the shallow waters between Long Island and the New Jersey coast.

The Departments of Interior, Energy and Commerce on March 29 announced a goal to deploy 30 GW of offshore wind in the U.S. by 2030.

“Favorable pricing” resulting from the February Texas weather event contributed to strong first quarter results for AVANGRID, the company reported May 4.

AVANGRID, headquartered in Connecticut, aspires to be the leading sustainable energy company in the United States. The company has approximately \$38 billion in assets and has two primary lines of business: Avangrid Networks and Avangrid Renewables.

Preliminary data from the federal Energy Information Administration indicates that over 4.0 Gigawatts (GW) of electric capacity are scheduled to retire and approximately 10.8 GW of electric capacity are scheduled to enter commercial operations during the 2021 summer. A majority of the electric capacity additions are expected to come from solar, wind, and battery resources. California leads the country in battery storage capacity additions as part of the summer readiness efforts to increase available capacity to serve both peak load and net load peak. California is projected to add approximately 1 GW of battery storage capacity. Texas is projected to add 3.3 GW of renewable capacity provided by solar and wind as well as nearly 500 MW of battery storage.

The California Independent System Operator May 12 said it was “guardedly optimistic” it would avoid repeating last summer’s “load shed” events, but “potential challenges in meeting demand” remain, according to its 2021 Summer Loads and Resources Assessment.

The ISO will be at the greatest operational risk during a late summer widespread heat wave that results in high ISO loads and low net imports due to high peak demands in neighboring areas, concurrent with the diminishing effective load carrying capability of solar resources and the wane of hydro generation.

The 8 p.m. period during high-load days is emerging as the period of highest risk, as

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daily solar output drops off. Conservation during extreme events will continue to

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## Oakes:

*continued from front page*

fallout too. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the MMLP office to the public this past year, there was already a transition away from people coming in to pay bills. Automatic bill payments are popular and convenient for so many people, and so the face-to-face time has diminished.

“Losing that personal touch with our customers was hard for me,” Barb said. “Seeing and helping our customers is my favorite part of this job.” The 18th of the month has

always been the due date for paying one’s light bill, and therefore the busiest day at the office. But, not any longer, and Barb misses that.

Actually, she is not even in the office every day any longer. Since COVID hit, Barb and Char have been taking turns alternating between working in the office and working from home. That was sad for them both not to get to see one another. “It was hard at first because I am used to being here in the office,” Barb said. Working from home can be productive, but you also need to be very self-motivated and have a good mindset.

Overall, Barb would by far rather be in the office with her co-workers and serving customers in person.

COVID also spurred Barb and her husband, Rick, to sit down and really think and talk about their future.

Barb talked to Chris Trembley about her retirement last September and made an official announcement on her dad’s birthday: Nov. 12, 2020. She wanted to give MMLP a lot of transition time. “When you have had someone working in this position for that long, how do you teach somebody what you do every day? I wanted to give them plenty of time to find a replacement and time for me to train that person,” she said.

Barb was going to stay until June 30; that was her dad’s retirement date. Yes, she is sentimental about that, but, “I feel really comfortable leaving now, because Jill [Monson, Oakes’ replacement] is doing a great job,” Barb said. Jill began on Feb. 1 and has been working with Barb to learn the ropes.

“It is hard to let go. This is like my second family, but it was time for someone fresh, with new ideas, to take over,” Barb said. “This is a new chapter I am starting. And, it is time for me to move on while Rick and I are healthy and can enjoy life.”

The couple has four children and six grandchildren.



Barb Oakes (center) visited with customers at this 2014 open house in the Madelia Municipal Utilities power plant.



*photo courtesy of Princeton Public Utilities*

## Scholarship Winner Awarded

Geoffrey Skeim, a senior at Princeton High School, May 25 received a certificate for his first place finish in the MMUA Tom Bovitz Memorial Scholarship Contest. Pictured, from left to right, are: MMUA’s Steve Downer and Princeton Public Utilities Commissioners Greg Hanson (chair), Richard Schwartz and Dan Erickson. MMUA is grateful for the opportunity to address the Commission and present Skeim’s certificate in person.

They are looking forward to spending more time together. Barb and Rick love to travel.

“It used to be – before the pandemic – we would choose a state and go explore that state,” Barb said. However, some states have been challenging to do because they have been limited by the number of their vacation days, but now time is on their side and they can explore at their leisure.

Given the situation at the time, Barb declined a retirement party open house. Those who know her and work with her would say that anything other than a huge sendoff with lots of people, food and hugs – as well as some laughter and tears – would fall short by a long way of what

Barb deserves after her years of dedicated service. Barb admits she has had plenty of tearful moments already; she is at peace with leaving quietly. Emotionally, it is far easier for her this way.

As she excitedly anticipates all that she can do, see and experience as a retired person, she knows that the transition will be a mixed bag.

“I will miss the customers and my coworkers,” she said. “I still will get up early, my brain is just programmed to do that, but now my days are my own.” Yes, it is bittersweet. And, Barb told her MMLP family that she is always just a phone call or email away if they need her for anything.

## Upcoming Events

### Annual Summer Conference

**August 16-18, Cragun’s Resort**

Looking forward to getting together again! Registration materials have been emailed. You may also visit our website or contact rkelly@mmua.org for more information.

#### Monday, Aug. 16

Pre-Conference Events:

Golf “Best Ball Scramble” Tournament Legacy Golf Course

Paul Bunyan Bike Trail – Nisswa Resort Check-In

Welcome Reception & Dinner

#### Tuesday, Aug. 17

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Mark Nibaur, MMUA President, Austin Utilities

Finding Your Beat, The Rhythm of Life

Tim Eggebraaten, the ‘Off-Duty Chief’

Looking Ahead—A National Perspective

Alex Hofmann

VP Technical & Operations Services, American Public Power Association

A Transmission Vision for the Upper Midwest

Mark Mitchell, Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency

The Washington Scene

Michael Nolan, MMUA Washington Representative

DER & Technical Specifications Manual

Bob Jagusch & Bill Black, MMUA

Perfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)

Jim de Lambert, Carlson McCain, Inc. and Nicole Blasing, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Tradeshow & Reception

Banquet & Awards

#### Wednesday, Aug. 18

MMUA Business Meeting

Updates from the Dept. of Commerce:

Energy Assistance, Jon, Brown, Office of Energy Assistance.

Energy Conservation & Optimization (ECO) Act of 2021—What it Means for CIP  
Representative from the Minnesota Department of Commerce

State Legislative Developments

Kent Sulem,

MMUA and Doug

Carnival, Mc-

Grann Shea Car-

nival Straughn &

Lamb

Issues Round-Up

Jack Kegel, Bob

Jagusch and

Mike Willetts, MMUA



## Save the dates:

**September 14, Minnesota Lineworkers Rodeo**

**September 14-17, Overhead School**

Watch your email for information on these events in the coming weeks.