



Utility work is often outside work, and MMUA schools reflect that reality. Weather varies but fresh air is often part of the recipe. Here, attendees at the MMUA Substation School were dampened by a few raindrops as they toured a top-notch Anoka Municipal Utilities substation.

Turnout strong for Substation instruction

Not a seat went unfilled as MMUA members returned in force to in-person training, at the annual MMUA Substation School, held April 6-8 at Anoka Public Safety Building/Fire Station 1.

Forty-five people attended.

The school included both classroom instruction from industry experts and instructional tours of two Anoka Municipal Utility substations. MMUA partnered on the school with the Minnesota Rural Electric Association.

MMUA Associate Members provided the in-

Substation: see page 9

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State-regulated utilities receive approval to move back to 'normal'

Editor's note: A slightly less in-depth version of this article originally appeared in the April eSOURCE electronic newsletter.
by Steve Downer

While Gov. Tim Walz retains his pandemic-related emergency powers, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) has approved—for the state's rate-regulated utilities—a transition away from emergency-

related utility customer service rules, including a prohibition on disconnection for non-payment.

The MPUC on April 15 tentatively approved 'transition plans' designed to move utilities back toward their pre-pandemic customer service practices. Reflecting the last-minute nature of discussions around several topics, the Commission moved to deem transition plans for the

bulk of Minnesota state-regulated utilities complete on April 23. This delayed approval gives MPUC staff time to uncover potential issues that might need addressing in the time between the April 15 hearing and April 23.

CenterPoint and Minnesota Energy Resources (MERC), which had a general approach that differed somewhat from the

other utilities, will file amended transition plans by Friday, April 23. The MPUC delegated to its executive secretary authority to deem those plans complete upon review.

In comments introducing the topic, MPUC Chair Katie Sieben said the pandemic continues with devastating conse-

Normal: see page 5 please

Inside Stories

MMUA Concludes Whirlwind Tour of the State
page 4



Generation School aims to keep municipal plants ready for action



More than any other MMUA school, the equipment is the star of the show at the MMUA Generation School. New or old, these generators have proven their value repeatedly over the years.

The value of local electric generating plants was proven again this February, when cold weather enveloped the nation's midsection, natural gas prices climbed to record highs, and dual-fueled power plants charged into action.

Many of these life- and budget-saving electric generators were municipally-owned.

To better ensure these plants will be available when needed, and operated safely and efficiently when the time comes, MMUA held its annual Generation School April 20-22 at Princeton and several nearby locations, including Elk River.

The school offered classroom and hands-on instruction on two of the historical workhorses of municipal electric generation: training on Fairbanks Morse engine/generator sets was held at the Princeton Public Utilities power plant; training on Cooper Bessemer engine sets was held at the Elk River Municipal Utilities power plant.

Generation: see page 8 please

MMUA Welcomes New Natural Gas Circuit Rider
page 6



MMUA Scholarship Winners Named
page 16



Xcel embarks on largest wind resource build-out in company history

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) March 25 approved Xcel Energy's Renewable Energy Standards (RES) Rider Revenue Requirements for 2019 and 2020 and RES Adjustment Factors.

It was no small matter, as the company, according to regulatory documents, is currently engaged in the largest build-out of new wind resources in its history.

The wind projects for which Xcel Energy requested cost recovery in its renewable energy standards (RES) Rider Petition include Courtenay, Blazing Star I, Blazing Star II, Foxtail, Freeborn, Crowned Ridge II, Lake Benton, Dakota Range I & II, Jeffers and Community Wind North.

These projects, noted regulatory documents, "are crucial to Xcel for achieving its clean energy goals."

Xcel's 2019-2020 revenue requirements overall have tripled from \$21.2 million in 2018, to \$38.2 million in 2019

and \$64.0 million in 2020. The increase reflects increased expenditures as construction is completed and projects are placed in-service.

The combined total of Xcel's 2019 and 2020 revenue requirement would be \$101.8 million, to be recovered via RES Rider adjustment factor of 4.736 percent of revenue.

Generally, a public utility may not change its rates without undergoing a rate case. However, the Legislature has allowed a utility to petition the Commission to approve a rate schedule that provides for the automatic adjustment of charges to recover prudently incurred investments, expenses, or costs associated with facilities constructed, owned, or operated by a utility to satisfy requirements, provided those facilities were previously approved by the Commission.

Xcel's Renewable Energy Standard (RES) Rider is designed to allow for the automatic adjustment of charges to recover investments, ex-

penses, or costs associated with facilities constructed, owned, or operated by a utility to satisfy the RES Statute, provided those facilities were previously approved by the Commission.

Initially, Xcel's RES Rider contained only costs associated with the true-up of Production Tax Credits (PTC) related to energy production at Company-owned wind farms.

The 2019 and 2020 RES Rider revenue requirements include costs and expenses associated with the Courtenay Wind farm and the 1,550 MW Wind Portfolio, which have been previously approved for RES Rider recovery, as well as three additional projects: the Dakota Range I and II project, Jeffers Wind and Community Wind North.

The revenue requirements are offset by a true-up of actual production tax credits (PTCs), and the proceeds from the sales of Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) since the last RES Rider Petition was filed.

Xcel Chief Operating Officer Bob Frenzel was quoted as saying in a recent S&P Global Market Intelligence report that the company was going to add almost 6,000

megawatts of new wind and new solar into the upper Midwest over the next decade. It will also add energy storage and request new combustion turbines.

MPUC approves power agreement for Google data center in Becker

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) March 18 approved a Purchased Power Agreement (PPA) between Heartland Divide Wind II and Xcel Energy.

Xcel intends to allocate 150 MW of the 200 MW from Heartland Divide II to supply renewable energy for a potential, approved Google data center in Becker.

Pursuant to the renewable energy sourcing plan in the Electric Service Agreement (ESA) Xcel has with Honeycrisp LLC (an affiliate of Google LLC), Xcel must procure incremental renewable energy resources that will be used to match the data center's annual energy usage.

The 150 MW portion set aside for the data center reflects the remaining half of a 300 MW sourcing plan approved in a previous docket. The first half will come from the 151.2 MW Dakota Range III wind facility, which was approved on July 19, 2019. The other 50 MW will be used to supply Xcel's Renewable*Connect program.

Xcel first requested, in October 2020, Commission approval of a PPA between the Company and Heartland Divide Wind II for a 200-mega-

watt (MW) wind project located in central Iowa. The project has a targeted commercial operation date of December 31, 2021. The project's Generator Interconnection Agreement was executed in January 2020. The PPA has a 25-year term.

Output from the plant will serve as an energy source for the expanded Renewable*Connect program and to fulfill the Company's obligations under the Honeycrisp LLC Electric Service Agreement.

Xcel will be the Market Participant for the project, and as such, responsible for scheduling it into the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) market. As the Market Participant, Xcel will also be responsible for dispatching the facility, which includes responding to MISO's curtailment instructions.

However, unique to this PPA, is that it does not have a compensable curtailments provision, which benefits ratepayers by eliminating the financial risk of curtailments.

Consistent with previous estimates, after Xcel secured its 100 MW offtake agree-

Google: see facing page



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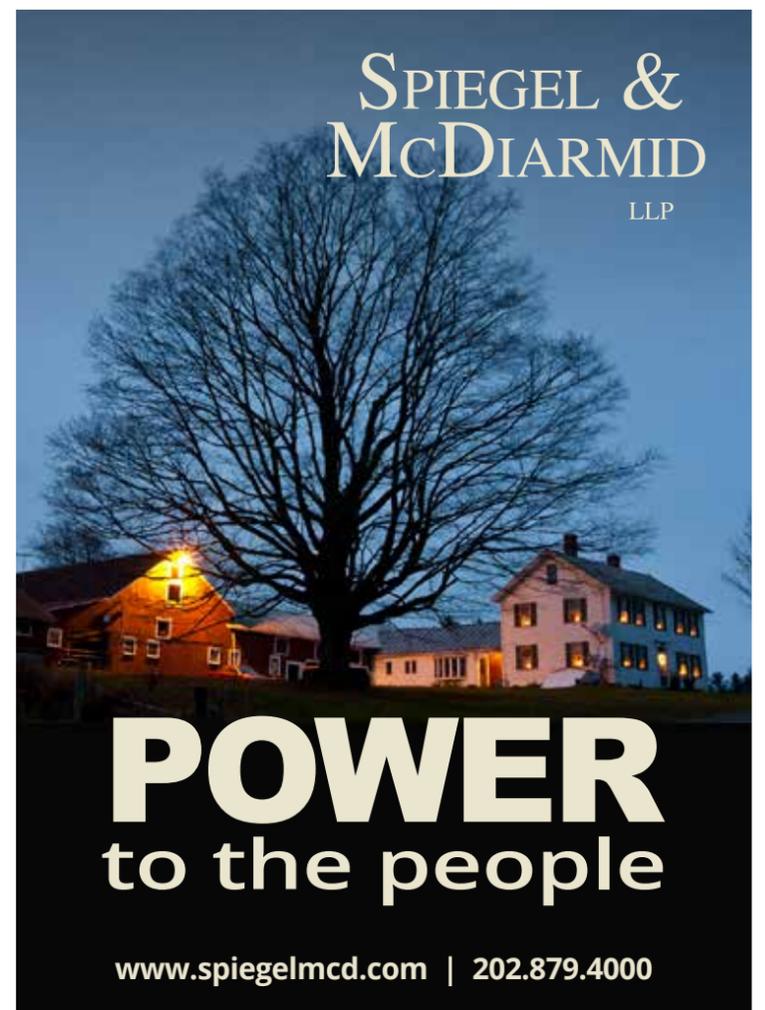
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Minnesota Supreme Court upholds arrangements underpinning power plant

The Minnesota Supreme Court April 21 ruled that the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) is not required to conduct review—under the Minnesota Environmental Protection Act—before approving affiliated-interest agreements that govern construction and operation of a Wisconsin power plant by a Minnesota utility.

The issue arose when Minnesota Power, a Minnesota public utility, petitioned the MPUC, in July 2017, for approval of a resource plan, including the Nemadji Trail Energy Center (NTEC), a \$700 million natural gas-fueled power plant, to be located in Superior, Wisconsin.

Because Wisconsin does not allow foreign entities to obtain a license, permit, or

franchise to own or operate a power-generation facility in Wisconsin, NTEC will be jointly owned and developed by South Shore Energy LLC, a Wisconsin affiliate of Minnesota Power and Dairyland Power, a Wisconsin generation and transmission cooperative.

The MPUC found that the capacity purchase from NTEC, as proposed by Minnesota Power, is needed and reasonable because it is a cost-effective resource for meeting the company's energy needs as it retires older coal-powered resources. In reaching this conclusion, the Commission disagreed with an administrative law judge's conclusions.

On review, the MPUC concluded that its jurisdiction is limited to power plants

proposed to be built in Minnesota. Because NTEC will be built entirely in Wisconsin and is not a cross-border project, the MPUC concluded, it is not subject to Minnesota's permitting and environmental review regulations. The MPUC also found the approval of the affiliated-interest agreements would not grant permission to Minnesota Power to construct or operate the plant; rather, that permission would have to be obtained from Wisconsin regulators.

The court of appeals reversed the MPUC's decision to deny the petition for review, concluding that the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act "requires all state agencies to consider 'to the fullest extent practicable' the environmental consequences

flowing from their actions."

The Supreme Court, based on the plain language of section 216B.48, found "we cannot conclude that the Legislature contemplated the need for an environmental review simply because a regulated utility enters into and seeks Commission approval of an affiliated-interest agreement."

Consideration of social and environmental impacts in the context of affiliated-interest agreement approval focuses on whether the agreement is fair to ratepayers, said the Supreme Court, and whether it is needed and reasonable to meet the utility's needs and consumer demand.

Minnesota's laws, noted the court, are not generally enforceable outside of the territory of the State.

The Supreme Court reversed the court of appeals decision and remanded the case back to that court.

Numerous parties filed amicus curiae briefs with the court. Those familiar to readers of this newsletter (besides a variety of environmental organizations) were: Missouri River Energy Services, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and Minnesota Rural Electric Association, Dairyland Power Cooperative, Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association, Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, Wisconsin Utilities Association, and Cooperative Network, Upper Midwest Municipal Energy Group and Municipal Electric Utilities of Wisconsin.

-by Steve Downer

Google

continued from facing page

ment for Deuel Harvest Wind a remaining 50 MW of new wind by the end of 2021 will still be needed.

According to Xcel, due to ongoing problems with the MISO generator interconnection queue process and increasing transmission upgrade costs, Heartland Divide II "likely represents one of the last opportunities for the incremental wind generation" in the near future. Xcel said this, along with economic modeling showing significant cost savings, demonstrated that the Heartland Divide II PPA is in the public interest.

Renewable Energy Credit (REC) optimization under a later-than-expected date of operation was not examined as an alternative to a new wind facility. Additionally, according to regulatory documents, there had not been any assurance that the data center will even be constructed. According to Xcel's most recent update filed in a June 15, 2020 Annual Report, Google had not yet notified the Company of its intent to proceed with this project.

For further context, the 300 MW was based on a highly uncertain path for both the initial size and ramping up of the data center, which was why Xcel modeled four different load growth scenarios. Notably, the Honeycrisp ESA has a 10-year term, and Xcel projected that 300 MW was a reasonable initial procurement, even though that amount was expected to cover the majority of the ESA term. Xcel chose to fulfill its obligations now because of "the

current favorable pricing for wind generation, due to the availability of production tax credits."

In other words, the obligation is not 300 MW of wind; rather, the obligation is that

Xcel must match the data center's usage and retire the associated RECs on the customer's behalf. There is no specific agreement between Xcel and Honeycrisp that Xcel shall supply the data

center with at least 300 MW of renewable energy.

The MPUC also authorized recovery of purchased energy costs for 150 MW of the project from all custom-

ers through the Fuel Clause Rider and 50 MW from Renewable*Connect participating customers through Program tariffs.

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MMUA completes unprecedented 17-stop 'Zoom' tour around Minnesota

Travel and in-person meetings have been made difficult, at times ruled out altogether, during the last year or so of pandemic concern and precaution.

But that didn't stop MMUA from recently embarking on an unprecedented membership outreach—a series of 14 regional online membership meetings.

The meetings were the brainchild of MMUA President Mark Nibaur, who doubles as general manager of Austin Utilities. Accompanying Nibaur on the whirlwind

virtual tour of the state was MMUA Chief Executive Officer Jack Kegel.

Meetings commenced March 23 and concluded April 27. Often, several of the 90-minute meetings were held a day. To better enable the available technology, Nibaur traveled to the MMUA office in Plymouth, where he and Kegel presided over the meetings from MMUA's large conference room, which now doubles as a video production studio.

Each meeting started with introductions and a look at



A look that will likely be forever associated with 2020-21: a computer screen showing the people involved in a meeting conducted online, in this case using Zoom. This particular screen shot was taken during MMUA's 17th and final Zoom tour meeting.

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MMUA offerings and activities, including an up-to-date look at the state and federal government relations efforts. The real purpose of the meetings, however, was to get feedback from members on

their situations, cares and concerns.

President Nibaur and MMUA staff made notes from each meeting. These notes are likely to inform MMUA focus and efforts in the com-

ing months.

MMUA thanks Mark Nibaur for his enthusiasm and effort in helping us reach out to the membership, and each member that participated in the tour.

FirstLine Supervision replacement dubbed Stepping Into Leadership

FirstLine Supervision has been one of MMUA's most successful training programs over the years. But things change, people come and go and the world moves on.

Recognizing this reality, MMUA has worked with Central Lakes College to develop a new employee training program. Working in conjunction with college staff, MMUA developed Stepping Into Leadership: Self, Team and Organization.

We will generally shorten this name to simply Stepping Into Leadership.

Stepping Into Leadership will be a two-year program, with 27 hours of instruction each year. We will use a combination of in-person and virtual instruction to allow more frequent classes.

According to preliminary

FirstLine Supervision graduates eight

Graduating from the First-Line Supervision program March 26 were:

Matt Flahave and Dave Havlik, Anoka Municipal Utility

Ray Wurm, Buffalo Municipal Utilities

Greg Wickenhauser, City of Chaska – Electric Dept.

Phil Markman, City of Jackson

David Ninow, Elk River Municipal Utilities

Jim Henderson, New Ulm Public Utilities

Lisa King, SMMPA.

plans, starting in October, the first session will be a two-day, in-person meeting at the MMUA Plymouth office. This will be followed by monthly virtual meetings up to three hours each in November, December, January, February and March.

If all goes as planned, the year will wrap up in April with another two-day in-person meeting at the MMUA office. Both years will follow this format.

Our goal is to begin with

one group this October. If demand is there, we could run two groups at the same time. We are also considering offering a refresher course for those who have completed FirstLine Supervision. We've decided to hold off on that idea until next year to focus on getting the new program up and running first.

MMUA continues to work out details with Central Lakes College. If interested in this new program, contact Rita Kelly at MMUA.

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Normal:

continued from front page

quences but with discussion of the lifting of the governor's emergency powers, and more federal money available to help with customer utility bills, a thoughtful transition period plan was needed.

The plans are designed to prompt customers in arrears back into payment plans, said Sieben, and encourage them to apply for financial assistance.

The transition timeline approved includes a number of key dates, including: May 1 for initial outreach to customers; June 1 for companies to resume sending disconnection notice; and Aug. 2 to resume service disconnections, under certain circumstances.

While these MPUC-approved transition plans do not apply to municipal utilities, they will likely be of interest and promise to serve as easily-defended policy going forward.

All parties involved in the state-sanctioned discussion seemed eager to move forward.

Customers in arrears need to work with utilities to maintain service.

Disconnections will be prohibited of customers with past due balances who have a pending application, or been deemed eligible for Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program/Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP/EAP) assistance for the duration of the transition period, through April 30, 2022.

The MPUC moved to disallow the imposition of any service deposits, down pay-

ments, interest late payment charges, or (business hour) reconnection fees through April 30, 2022 for customers who enter, or are complying with, a payment agreement. No fees or other charges are to be imposed on customers who are disconnected and reconnected, after defaulting on one payment agreement and who agree to re-establish that agreement, during the transition period, lasting until April 30, 2022. The second agreement needs to be adhered to—it marks the limit of fee or service charge protections.

This eventual imposition of late payment fees was a compromise—consumer advocates argued that it was enough to pay back arrears, because adding fees only makes arrangements harder to sustain.

The investor-owned utilities willingly agreed to suspend negative reporting to credit agencies for residential customers, as it appeared they did not make such reports anyway.

Among issues the MPUC did not include in its order was the length of payment plans, leaving this to the discretion of utilities with consideration of individual customer circumstances.

Utilities were required to notify customers of available energy assistance programs and how to apply. The MPUC and Department of Commerce will also be sending out joint communications.

The MPUC required reporting, from the utilities it regulates, of several practices, including: Service Deposits Charged; Reconnection Fees Charged; Down Payments Required; Interest/penalties/

State-regulated utility data showing customer status for February 2021

Utility	Residential Customers	Past Due Residential Customers	# Residential Customers Past Due	Total Dollars Past Due for Residential Customers	Average Past Due Amount for Past Due Customers	Average Monthly Residential Bill
Xcel	1,275,089	164,447	12.9%	\$86,817,499.00	\$527.94	\$106.90
CPE	820,870	117,803	14.4%	\$25,241,133.73	\$214.27	\$125.14
MERC	214,364	33,017	15.4%	\$7,917,276.67	\$239.79	\$96.95
MP	106,927	13,063	12.2%	\$4,789,951.69	\$366.68	\$133.44
Dakota Elect.	102,886	18,188	17.7%	\$6,469,079.78	\$356.00	\$102.00
OTP	51,718	7,556	14.6%	\$2,769,536.00	\$366.53	\$116.66
GP Nat Gas	19,301	4,692	24.3%	\$458,412.00	\$98.00	\$94.00
Gtr. MN Gas	8,618	583	6.8%	\$115,164.00	\$198.00	\$177.00

fees required.

The state-regulated utilities and many municipals and cooperatives suspended normal business practices at the onset of the pandemic.

On March 24, 2020, MPUC Chair Sieben and then-Commissioner of the Department

of Commerce Steve Kelley wrote to all of the state's utilities, requesting they work to reconnect disconnected customers and suspend disconnections and late payment fees for the duration of the state's declared peacetime emergency.

It was, Sieben noted on April 15, "an extraordinary request."

Sieben expressed her gratitude and appreciation to all utilities who worked with regulators, energy assistance agencies and their customers during this difficult time.

No PPA? No problem for 100-MW Regal Solar proposal

If you build it, will they come?

Regal Solar thinks so, in the case of its application for a Site Permit for an up to 100 megawatt (MW) project in the northwest corner of Benton County, south of U.S. Hwy. 10.

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) April 1 granted a certificate of need and issued a site permit for the solar energy generating facility to be located on approximately 800 acres. The project would permanently impact approximately 711 acres of predominately agricultural land (less than one percent of the total agricultural land in Benton County).

Associated facilities include an approximately 3.3-mile-long above-ground 34.5 kilovolt collection line, a 34.5/115 kilovolt step-up substation, and an approximately 700-foot-long 115 kilovolt transmission line that would connect the project substation to a new Minnesota Power-owned switching station.

Permits for the new switching station would be obtained by Minnesota Power separate from the proposed project.

Regal Solar has indicated that it is proposing the facility to sell energy, capacity, and renewable energy credits, either bundled or unbundled, to electric utilities or commercial customers or both. Regal Solar had not secured a power purchase agreement at the time of regulatory approval.

Regal Solar has withdrawn its Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) West Queue Position due to excessive facility cost upgrades. Regal will continue to

pursue a transmission inter-connection.

Regal was confident there would be a buyer for the energy, as the goal of the project is to help utilities satisfy Minnesota's Renewable Energy Standard or Solar Energy Standard.

The Department of Commerce concluded that Regal's forecast of the need for renewable energy expected to be produced by the proposed project was reasonable, considering the potential need for solar resources to meet the Renewable Energy Standard and Solar Energy Standard obligations in Minnesota and the region, as well as the stated potential need for additional solar resources in the recent integrated resource plans of the state's investor owned utilities.

Regarding size, the Depart-

ment notes that, although collective information submitted by the utilities subject to the Minnesota Renewable Energy Standard indicates that there is sufficient capacity in aggregate to meet the Renewable Energy Standard through 2030, there was potential need for additional renewable resources from individual utilities with insufficient capacity to meet the Renewable Energy Standard.

Additionally, utilities in neighboring states may have a need for renewable energy.

Regal stated that the Project is expected to be in-service and operational by the end of 2021.

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MMUA welcomes Dennis Danielson as our new natural gas circuit rider

Dennis Danielson is the new MMUA Gas Circuit Rider.

Danielson was most recently head of the Bagley Public Utilities natural gas department. He has 25 years of natural gas experience and has been a licensed gas and water utility worker since 2003. As such, he is familiar with the operation of municipal natural gas systems.

He assisted in the development and implementation of the Operator Qualification Plan for Bagley's natural gas

system and worked on the city's Public Awareness Program for natural gas system. Using Simple, Handy, Risk-based Integrity Management Plan (SHRIMP) software from the American Public Gas Association (APGA) he created the Distribution Integrity Management Program for the city of Bagley's natural gas system.

Danielson was responsible for project planning and covered tasks on natural gas and water systems.

He worked on all aspects

of operations, maintenance activities and construction, including taking samples required by water and wastewater regulatory agencies. He updated programs in departments to remain in compliance with rules and regulations. He also nominated monthly gas usage along with locking price fixes to help provide more stable consumer gas prices.

He prepared and submitted annual natural gas and water department budgets, along with maintaining necessary supplies to run the departments. He also participated in yearly audits answering questions on departmental spending.

Danielson is MEA Energy Association certified in multiple covered tasks through operator qualifications modules and gained extensive work experience on natural gas systems over the last 25 years.

While with Bagley, Danielson routinely prepared and trained emergency response with fire department personnel, held pre-construction meetings, maintained records and prepared for annual regulatory inspections.

He was also manager of Bagley's wellhead protection plan. As such, he worked with state and various agencies implementing and developing plan documentation.

He was also head of the water department, where he implemented numerous regulatory plans in the water and wastewater departments.

Danielson has years of experience in generating and submitting annual reports to state and federal regulators



Dennis Danielson

issuance, along with the new water supply plan program.

He is a former winner of the Minnesota Office of Pipeline Safety Gas Locate Rodeo and has won numerous MPCA awards for operation and maintenance of a Class D wastewater system.

He is a Class C – Water Supply System Operator; and Class D – Wastewater Treatment Facility Operator.

He completed four years of college at Bemidji State University and the FirstLine Supervision Utility Management Program.

He came to MMUA highly recommended by his industry peers and those he worked with in state regulatory agencies. Please join us in welcoming Dennis.

for natural gas and water departments. He held annual inspections with state regulators.

In 2017, he completed the application for National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit re-

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Public power leader Jay Anderson named new CMPAS chief executive officer

Eden Prairie and Blue Earth, MN – The Central Municipal Power Agency Services (CMPAS) Board of Directors April 12 announced the hiring of Mr. Jay Anderson, MBA as the agency’s new Chief Executive Officer.



Jay Anderson

“We are delighted to have Mr. Anderson joining CMPAS,” said President Crystal Johnson. “The Board of Directors was deeply impressed with his proven leadership abilities and wide range of experience in the public power industry.”

Anderson, who will join CMPAS on May 3, 2021, is an experienced leader in the municipal utility environment. He comes to CMPAS from Bay City Municipal Electric Utility in Bay City, Michigan where he most recently

served as Director of the Electric Utility.

Prior to working at Bay City, Mr. Anderson served for 30 years in various capacities with the Omaha Public Power District in Omaha, Nebraska, including as Project Director of the Power Forward Initia-

tive. A Nebraska native, he has a Bachelor’s of Business Administration from Creighton University in Omaha, where he majored in Finance and also holds an MBA from Creighton.

He most recently served on the Executive Committee of the Michigan Public Power Association. In the past, he led the Large Public Power Association Rates Committee and focused on legislation relating to unbundling of retail rates.

CMPAS conducted an extensive national search over the last eight months.

Central Municipal Power Agency/Services is a joint action agency providing power management and utility services for its electric utility members and affiliates.

CMPAS operates as a project-oriented, partial or full-requirements agency. CMPAS provides a wide range of services including strategic management, long-term power supply planning and

procurement, energy market scheduling services, transmission ownership, project development and administration, utility accounting and finance support, and distribution mapping and modeling.

MMUA meets with Sens. Klobuchar and Smith, virtually

U.S. Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith April 20 individually took part in virtual meetings with approximately 40 MMUA member representatives.

MMUA President Mark Nibaur and President-Elect Jenny Palmer hosted the meetings. Three participants for each meeting presented MMUA’s positions and their

own perspectives on policy regarding climate change, clean energy, the February natural gas price spike, and several energy-related tax issues.

The Senators were attentive and asked several clarifying questions. In a normal year, these meetings happen in a conference room on Capitol Hill. This year’s pandemic-induced virtual alternative

made it possible for a few people to join in who wouldn’t normally make the trip to Washington.

Sen. Klobuchar is co-sponsoring the “Clean Energy for American Act,” to provide tax incentives and comparable non-tax alternatives for developing more non-fossil based energy projects.

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Generation

continued from front page

In addition, tours were conducted of Connexus Energy's Ramsey Renewable Station and Elk River's Waste Reclamation (landfill gas generation) Plant.

The school began the afternoon of April 20 with classroom work at the Mille Lacs Historical Society, across the street from Princeton Public Utilities. Jeffrey Crampton of Fairbanks Morse shared his expertise on Engine Operations & Maintenance.

Following that, the tours were conducted at the Elk River Waste Reclamation Plant and Ramsey Renewable Station.

That evening, operators got to share stories and strengthen or make new relationships at a Welcome Reception held at a Princeton hotel, sponsored by Fairbanks Morse.

Wednesday was devoted to hands-on training in the municipal power plants.

Crampton and co-worker Brian King led the training on Fairbanks Morse engines at Princeton. In recognition of the knowledge and skill of our



Jeff Crampton of Fairbanks Morse (foreground, left) was the lead instructor at the Princeton power plant. The various operators were also generous in sharing know-how with each other.

own municipal operators, Bob Heine of New Prague Utilities Commission led instruction on the Cooper Bessemer engines at the Elk River power plant.

Hands-on instruction at the

plants included a variety of tasks. The schedule allowed participants to get their questions answered on a variety of topics and afforded the opportunity to perform various tasks with their own hands (a valuable learning opportunity for any mechanical procedure).

The final day's sessions were held back at the Mille Lacs Historical Society. Dale Narlock and Ronnie Lund of Thief River Falls Municipal Utilities presented on relay testing and Power Plant Arc Flash.

Cory Lang, of L & S Electric, Inc., wrapped up the meeting by covering Switchgear Maintenance and



Paul Parstens (left) and Scott Daniels of Princeton Public Utilities took advantage of time in the plant to delve into a Fairbanks Morse opposed-piston engine.

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Recommended Intervals.

The meeting concluded with Discussion and "Take-aways," led by MMUA Generation Coordinator Bob Sewell.



The school afforded ample opportunity for question-and-answer with other municipal operators.

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Substation:

continued from front page

struction.

Paul Schlies, Ben Swanson, Chris Warden and Derek Drewiske of Energis High Voltage Resources opened the school Tuesday afternoon with a look at Substation Maintenance and Inspections. This presentation covered proper operation and maintenance, applying best practices on a variety of operational concepts and maintenance issues.

Kevin McCutcheon of Power System Engineering offered his expertise on Proper Switching Techniques during Wednesday's opening presentation.

Following a break, Dave Krause, Krause Power Engineering, presented on Your Substation: The Importance of Understanding Your Equipment. This presentation focused on the many different components and systems integral to the workings of a substation. Knowing what they are and what they do is vitally important as it relates to safely operating substations.

Krause also gave a safety briefing for tours of two recently-updated Anoka Municipal Utility substations. After lunch, participants dodged a few raindrops for the interesting tours.

The school concluded Thursday morning with a talk on The Ins and Outs of a Portable Power Substation, by John Leemhuis, Jordan Transformer. This thorough overview of mobile substations included: their use applications and how they have evolved over the years. Also covered were the electrical, mechanical and engineering controls that are considered when designing and building a mobile substation.

MMUA thanks Anoka Municipal Utility, the Associate Members who provided expert instruction, the school participants and the utilities and Associate Member companies who sent them.



Participants gathered at a second Anoka substation for another substation look.



Dave Krause of Krause Power Engineering (left) provided classroom instruction and also led tours of two Anoka Municipal Utility substations.



Left: Anoka utility personnel attending included, from left to right: Troy Timm, Neil Larson, Dave Havlik, Warren Magnus, Matt Flahave and James Brown. Above: classroom instruction.

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The cities of **Lamberton** and **Wilmont** have joined MMUA as Regular Members.

The City of Lamberton is located at 112 Second Ave. W. (P.O. Box 356) in Lamberton, MN 56152. Phone is (507) 752-7601. Email is lambertoncity@centurylink.net

Madonna Peterson is Lamberton city clerk. The city population was 824 at the 2010 census. Lamberton is located in southern Redwood County, east of Springfield on U.S. Hwy. 14.

The City of Wilmont is located at 316 4th Ave (P.O. Box 76) in Wilmont, MN 56185. The city population was 339 at the 2010 census. Wilmont is the highest point in Lyon County, northwest of Worthington. Phone is (507) 926-5235. Email address is wilmont316@gmail.com

Each of the cities also joined the MMUA Drug and Alcohol Testing Consortium.

Willmar Municipal Utilities employees, friends and family held a clean-up day April 22 at Robbins Island Regional Park. Together, they filled 10 trash bags of accumulated winter litter.

Around the State

Everybody came as a volunteer after work on that Thursday. The community service work took an hour, and was endorsed by the city park staff.

The **City of Brainerd** is buying 250 banners to mark the city's 150th anniversary, and Brainerd Public Utilities has volunteered to put them up, free of charge, on light poles dotting major thoroughfares.

Here's a new one: an **Owatonna** man led police on a short chase before jumping into the Straight River behind the Owatonna Public Utilities headquarters building. The gambit was unsuccessful as the man was taken into custody.

The **City of Elk River** recently took ownership of an out-of-service but historic water tower in the city. The city will repair and paint the tower, which was added to the National Register of

Historic Places in 2012. Elk River Municipal Utilities transferred \$90,000 to the city to help with the maintenance.

The 137-foot tower will be repainted back to its original colors (silver structure and tank with a red roof). The city name will be repainted in block letters, to complete the original look. The tower is located near downtown. It was built in 1920 by the Minneapolis Steel and Machinery Co.

The **Hutchinson** city council April 13 unanimously approved a partnership for a 1.1 million kilowatt solar plant on city-owned land. The solar plant will interconnect with nearby Hutchinson Utilities Commission (HUC) infrastructure. HUC will own much of the equipment but will lease the land from the city.

HUC previously committed to becoming a 100 percent net zero carbon utility this year.

Austin Utilities will install advanced metering infrastructure for its electric, gas and water systems. The point-to-multipoint meter reading system will support 12,000 electric, 9,500 water and 11,000 gas meters. Plans call for all the meters to be changed-out this summer.

The **Pierz** city council April 12 approved street and utility improvements estimated at \$2.7 million. A mile of street reconstruction on the east side of the city includes storm and sanitary sewer and water main reconstruction, along with a trail and electrical improvements, including undergrounding the system and new street lights.

The city's portion of the costs is estimated at slightly over \$1 million. That cost is reduced by a Safe Routes to School grant of approximately \$450,000.

The water and sewer lines will be replaced by the Rich Prairie Sewer and Water District, which will be the only part of the project assessed to property owners.

Marshall Municipal Utilities (MMU) is in the final stages of an \$11.5 million project adding water softening capability to its water treatment plant. The improvements will reduce hardness of city water from 35 to eight or nine grains.

The goal is to reduce the amount of salt customers use in home water softeners, and thereby reduce chlorides released from the city waste-

water plant to the Redwood River. The city needs to meet new chloride discharge limits in 2024.

The City of Marshall and MMU worked together on the pre-softening project. Marshall received a \$7 million state grant to help pay for the project, with the rest of the funding coming from the city and MMU.

To help pay that local share, MMU had to raise water rates 34 percent over a two-year period. It is hoped customers can recoup some of that cost with a reduced need to purchase water softener salt.

Novel Energy Solutions will build a 1.4 megawatt solar plant just outside of **Waseca**, and sell the power to Xcel Energy under that company's community solar project program.

Shakopee Public Utilities is covering the cost of extending a water line and water costs to a community garden site. The Community Action Partnership will also use the garden to grow produce for a local food shelf. The utility also owns the land on which the garden is located.



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Iron Mountain, MI & Topeka, KS, April 27, 2021—mPower Innovations has acquired the entire suite of software solutions developed by Ptarmigan Software, a Topeka-based software developer. This acquisition will expand mPower's portfolio of software to include Fiber/Coaxial Cable Management and Staking (Design & Construction) for utilities.

"This is an exciting opportunity for our company and the timing could not be better. As the push for broadband access increases, more of our utility customers and prospects are needing advanced tools to design and manage these complicated networks. mPower's GIS software and expertise will

Associate

Member News

enhance the spatial and analytical capabilities of these products and broaden their appeal," says Jason Brown, President and CEO of mPower Innovations.

This acquisition has added customers from 20 states and one U.S. territory. This expansion to mPower's customer base and software offerings will fuel continued growth.

mPower Innovations was founded in 2006 and is a leader in the geospatial industry. The company is headquartered in Iron Mountain, MI with additional offices in

Grand Rapids, MI, Appleton, WI, Long Island, NY, and Flowery Branch, GA.

mPower has a suite of software offerings, including an Outage Management System, Work Management System as well as Fiber, Staking, and IVR Solutions. The company's services division routinely builds and repairs connectivity models and performs GPS collections, joint use pole audits, and map cleanup and conversion services. mPower is a bronze member of the Esri Partner Network. You can learn more about mPower Innovations at www.mpowerinnovations.com.

The City of Hecla, South Dakota has joined MMUA as an Associate Member. City offices are located at 206 Main Street. Mail should be sent to P.O. Box 188, Hecla, SD 57446.

Primary contact is Brandon Casey, utility superintendent. He can be reached at (605) 994-2333. Email is heclasd@heartlandpower.org

Along with benefitting from various services, the city is participating in MMUA's On-Site/On-Demand Four-Year Apprentice Lineworker Career Development program.

Austin taps reserves to help gas customers

At a special meeting held March 25, the Austin Utilities (AU) Board of Commissioners approved a plan to smooth out the impact and recoup increased natural gas costs from a historic price spike that occurred in February. The board approved using reserves to pay a portion of the additional cost and spread the cost recovery over time.

Each customer will be given seven months to pay their fair and equitable share. Those having difficulty can contact customer service to set up payment arrangements and help to receive any available financial heating assistance.

AU noted 65-75 percent of its anticipated usage was pre-purchased, at an average cost in February of \$3.21.

AU ran its Propane Air Plant daily during the event to displace natural gas load.

Commercial gas interruptible rate customers switched to alternate fuel.

A Natural Gas Peak Alert was announced on social media.

There were no service disruptions.

RPU institutes round-up program to help customers in time of need

Rochester Public Utilities (RPU) April 5 announced the Neighbors Chipping In Program, a voluntary, ongoing fundraising program to benefit RPU customers in need of help. It allows RPU customers to help other RPU customers by agreeing to have their monthly utility bill "rounded up" to the next whole dollar or by an amount of their choosing.

Customers can donate by rounding up their monthly total bill to the nearest dollar each month, or they can pick a fixed amount (e.g. \$5, \$10,

or any dollar amount of their choosing). The rounded-up amount or fixed amount will then appear on their monthly utility bill.

RPU is collaborating with Three Rivers Community Action to allocate the collected funds to customers who qualify and already participate in the Energy Assistance Program (EAP). When there are not enough EAP funds available, Neighbors Chipping In will help supplement the need within the Rochester community.

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Nominations sought for MMUA Awards and three board members seek re-election

MMUA's Nominations and Awards Committee is accepting nominations for MMUA awards. The deadline to submit a nomination is June 30. This is a great way to recog-

nize a municipal utility colleague, a public official, or a municipal utility system for showing leadership and innovation and providing an example for others to follow.

Nomination forms can be downloaded from MMUA.org at the Awards and Recognition page on the 'About' menu. All nominations will be considered by MMUA's Nomination and Awards Committee and the awards will be presented at the MMUA Summer Conference in August.

Here is a brief summary of the awards for which we are accepting nominations. Please consider recognizing the accomplishments of a member of our community by submitting a nomination.

- **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.

- **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.

- **Distinguished Service Award.** This award is given to individuals who perform outstanding service in support of the association and its goals.

- **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.

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

- **Honorary Lifetime Membership Award.** 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.

Three directors up for re-election

Serving on MMUA's Board of Directors is an honor, as well as a great opportunity for professional growth. No seats on the Board are coming open this year. Up for re-election, having completed their first three-year term are Jenny Palmer (Winthrop), Scott Grabe (Staples) and Dave Meyer (Glencoe).

Nominating forms can be



Grabe



Meyer



Palmer

found on the MMUA website at www.mmua.org/about/awards-and-recognition

Please return completed nomination forms, by June 30 to Theresa Neddermeyer via email (tneddermeyer@mmua.org), fax (763.551.0459) or mail to 3131 Fernbrook Lane N., Suite 200, Plymouth, MN 55447.

If you have any questions about the nomi-

nations process or what service on the board involves, please contact MMUA Chief Executive Officer Jack Kegel. He will be happy to fill you in on the role of the board member and the time commitment involved. You can email jkegel@mmua.org or call 763.746.0701.

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MMUA President Nibaur challenges members with \$100 MUAF donation

Have you contributed to the Municipal Utilities Action Fund?

MUAF is MMUA's political fund.

The fund provides an orga-

nized means of making contributions. This is important because MMUA needs to be visible at various fundraisers for committee chairs, key legislators, and caucuses.

Since establishing MUAF, MMUA staff has had an increased presence at political events, which has been beneficial. Without MUAF contributions, staff would have to pay to attend these events (which are increasing in cost) out of their own pockets.

Contributions to MUAF come from individuals—no corporate funds are accepted.

Cash contributions of \$20 or less can be made anonymously. Contributions over \$20 up to \$200 require name and address. Contributions over \$200 require name, address, and employer.

MUAF funds are held in a separate MUAF bank account.

Contributions are made in MMUA's nonpartisan tradition. Oversight is provided by



MMUA President Mark Nibaur, left, recently made a \$100 donation to the Municipal Utilities Action Fund (MUAF). Nibaur challenges MMUA members to strengthen municipal utility political action by making a similar MUAF donation.

MMUA's Executive Director and Board.

Contribution Levels

- Bronze: \$20 to \$49
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- Gold: \$100 or more

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showcasing their generous support of MUAF!

For questions or donation details, please contact MMUA Government Relations Attorney Bill Black. His email address is at bblack@mmua.org

More LIHEAP money now available; eligibility guidelines loosened

Due in part to the expected addition of over \$100 million in LIHEAP funds for Minnesota from the American Rescue Plan Act, the Minnesota Energy Assistance Program (EAP) plans to implement several policy updates effective April 15.

The DOC is extending the deadline for submitting an

application for this program year from May 31, 2021, to September 1, 2021.

The Energy Assistance Program (EAP) income eligibility threshold will increase from 50 percent of State Median Income (SMI) to 60 percent of SMI.

Commerce EAP will work with local service providers

to identify households with incomes between 50 percent and 60 percent SMI, to ensure they are served.

Normally, primary heat payments are broken into four separate monthly payments. Starting April 15, all newly created primary heat payments will be collapsed to one payment.



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Jeff Hurd, P.E., General Manager / Hopkinsville Electric System & EnergyNet

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#10-1224 (2016-12)

A recent California Public Utilities Commission staff report noted that clean energy and electrification mandates and system modernization have led to residential electric rates increasing faster than inflation since 2013. Wildfire mitigation costs are also affecting rates.

An independent analysis found net metering, which mandates utilities buy customer-generated renewable energy, increases bills for other customers.

Projections estimate Pacific Gas and Electric rates will be 40 percent higher than inflation by 2030, Southern California Edison rates will be 20 percent higher and San Diego Gas & Electric rates 70 percent higher.

The American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy released a report that increased use of electricity for space- and water-heating and electric vehicle charging could double or triple winter electric load.

Most utilities currently peak in the summer, but electrification, to reduce or eliminate carbon emissions, is driving an increase winter peaks. That will lead to increased stress on the grid during winter.

Utilities and some state regulators have filed requests for rehearing with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, questioning FERC's decision to require states to allow aggregated demand response to bid into wholesale markets. Some of those protests, which argue the order oversteps FERC authority, came from the Midcontinent Independent System Operator's footprint.

Approximately one quarter of the nation's electric utilities were exposed to the SolarWinds hack, the National Electric Reliability Corp. (NERC) said April 13. It added no activity was detected beyond the initial breach.

The attack, uncovered last year, reportedly hit hundreds of organizations, including U.S. government agencies. Officials urged continued vigilance in the face of persistent efforts to compromise computer networks.

Public hearings were held in mid-April for a proposed

see facing page please

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6.77 percent increase in Otter Tail Power Co., electric rates. The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission previously granted the company a 3.23 percent interim rate increase.

The company is seeking to recover costs associated with a wind energy plant in North Dakota and costs for retiring its Hoot Lake coal-fired power plant.

A year-long Wisconsin moratorium on utility disconnections ended April 15. Just over 93,000 residential and 4,800 commercial customers were reportedly subject to a possible disconnection.

The Earth Island Journal reported April 12 that a 30,000 acre wind energy development could jeopardize Illinois chorus frogs, which burrow and feed underground. Vibrations from the wind turbines, said a local university herpetologist, are likely to impact frog feeding rituals.

A new law in Iowa bans cities and counties from regulating the sale of propane or natural gas. Environmental and local government organizations opposed the bill.

Meanwhile in Kansas, a new law prohibits a municipality from banning the use of natural gas (as Berkeley, California did in 2019). The city of Lawrence opposed the bill, as it had committed to powering the city with all renewable energy by 2035.

The 1,400 megawatt Unit 1 at the Emirates Nuclear Energy Corp.'s Barakah nuclear facility has entered commercial operation, reported POWER Magazine. The plant is being built by Korea Electric Power Corp. When complete, the four-unit plant will have 5.6 gigawatts of total generation capacity, which would supply about 25 percent of the United Arab Emirates total peak electric demand.

Mulberry, Kansas, pop. 500, is suing British Petroleum after it received a \$53,000 bill for February natural gas. Mulberry said the bill would bankrupt the city and was 100 times higher than a regular month. The city said it had budgeted \$81,000 to buy gas for the year.

Utility Dive reported March 31 on an S&C Electric Company 2021 State of Commercial and Industrial Power Reliability Report, prepared

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in conjunction with Frost & Sullivan, that the number of companies affected by momentary power outages (less than five minutes) doubled from 20 to 40 percent from

2019 to 2020. The survey found 44 percent of companies reported they lost power monthly or more frequently. The companies blamed the decline on baseload genera-

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1 www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes499051.htm | 2 www.bls.gov/oes/2017/may/oes499052.htm
3 www.bls.gov/oes/2017/may/oes472152.htm

tion and rise of renewables, a conclusion disputed from

a renewable energy trade group.

Now more than ever, municipal utilities needed by the communities they serve

Editor's note: The following is the winning essay in the 2021 MMUA Tom Bovitz Memorial Scholarship Award contest.

by **Geoffrey Skeim**
Princeton, Minn.

Now more than ever, there is a need for an efficient and reliable source of energy. With the world moving to be more and more electric based each year, there is a challenge to keep up with the demand, but there is also a challenge to do it safely. Municipal utilities have done an incredible job keeping up to these new standards, while also maintaining the feeling of a small-town business by prioritizing customer service. The Princeton Public Utilities facility has local, fast, dependable, and clean service.

One of the various benefits of municipal utilities is that they are local. They hire local workers, which is good for many reasons: the workers understand the local needs better, customers see friendly and recognizable faces, and municipal utilities create local jobs. With the employees utilizing their own services, it adds in increased reason to maintain the highest standards. If there is a minor problem with anything, the employees will be some of the first to know because, like everyone else, they rely on utilities day in and day out. Also hiring workers from the area keeps friendly faces on the job. When you go to the office and see someone you know, it makes any process easier and less stressful. Municipal utilities create a demand for jobs anywhere a facility is established. It helps boost the local economy, and it is one way



Princeton Public Utilities has had many outreach efforts over the years—including this 2018 Public Power Week open house. Pictured facing the camera is former Electric Superintendent Jon Brooks.

the municipal utilities give back to the community.

Another benefit of municipal utilities is the fast and dependable service. In the springtime after storms, there are always trucks from the city out to inspect and fix any damage, oftentimes they are working the very next day. After one storm a few years ago, a neighbor's powerline was taken down by a fallen tree. The response from the Princeton Public Utilities was great; they were out working hard to repair the powerline, and they even showed up on a weekend to do it.

Another great thing about municipal utilities is that they keep their customers informed. Periodically, they host open houses to inform customers of what they have been doing and what they plan to do; this is convenient because it creates an easy environment for feedback. There is also good transparency between municipal utilities and their customers, whether it is sending out a brochure or a new plan. The honesty with what

Tom Bovitz Memorial Scholarship Contest award winners selected by judges April 27

The MMUA Tom Bovitz Memorial Scholarship Contest winners were selected Tuesday, April 27. The top four essays in the 21st annual contest are:

- First Place: Geoffrey Skeim, Princeton
- Second Place: Karl Peder-son, Elk River
- Third Place: Derek Brown, Rochester
- Fourth Place: McKenna Thomp-son, Sauk Centre.

The first-place scholarship carries an award of \$2,000, second place \$1,500, third place \$1,000 and fourth place \$500.

The contest was created as a public relations tool to increase the awareness of public power and create goodwill in the community for the local municipally-owned utility. Essay theme was "Municipal Utilities: Good for All of Us."

The essays were initially submitted to the governing body of the local utility. Winners of the local contests

were then entered in the state-wide contest. Judges included five MMUA member utility representatives and one MMUA staff member. Judges ranked their top four essays, point values were assigned and winners selected.

After tallying points this year, there was a tie for first place. Applying an existing procedure, Princeton was declared the first-place winner due to having garnered more first place votes.

The award is named in honor of the late Tom Bovitz, a firm believer in the value of education, who was a former general manager of Hibbing Public Utilities and MMUA president. MMUA, headquartered in Plymouth, represents the interests of the state's 124 municipally-owned electric and 33 municipally-owned gas utilities.

MMUA thanks all its members who forwarded contest materials to their local schools and all contest entrants.

is going on creates trust and long-lasting customers.

The pursuit of eco-friendliness is a fourth reason why municipal utilities are beneficial to all. They have options for alternative energy sources that are much safer for people and the planet. Offering sources like solar and wind energy is a great way to reduce emissions, which in turn will make electricity safe, relevant, and renewable for future generations. Other things that municipalities do to protect the planet are offering rebates on energy

efficient appliances and light bulbs. Municipal utilities also help cut down on waste by helping to make sure that things like old refrigerators are recycled properly.

These handful of reasons go to show just how important municipal utilities really are, and they are also the reasons my parents have been customers of Princeton Public Utilities for over 20 years and why my great grandparents were customers for nearly 60 years before them.

Upcoming Events

Underground School

May 11-14, MMUA Training Center, Marshall

Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association and our partners—Minnesota Rural Electric Association and American Public Power Association—are pleased to offer the 2021 Underground School.



The Underground School offers a hands-on training track with a variety of training sessions and an advanced technical course.

Deadline to register is May 19.

Minnesota Public Power Walleye Tournament

June 6, Rush Lake



See the Events calendar on the MMUA website for more information.

Annual Summer Conference

August 16-18, Cragun's Resort

Planning is underway for MMUA's annual summer get-together. We are keeping our fingers crossed for this one. Watch your email inbox or MMUA's various communications vehicles for more information!



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.