

With rebuilt dam, Lanesboro hydro plant operations improved

After more than a decade of planning, lobbying and waiting, work to rebuild the Lanesboro Dam is substantially complete. A dedication ceremony was held below the dam site on Thursday, Sept. 24.

The work gives a new lease on life to the Lanesboro Public Utilities hydroelectric facility, which has operated at the site since 1895.

City officials worked with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the State Historic Preservation Office, Fillmore County commissioners and the state Legislature, led by local Rep. Greg Davids and Sen. Jeremy Miller, to obtain state funding to cover the bulk of the \$4 million project costs. The DNR classified the dam as "high hazard" and state bonding funds were secured to re-



Lanesboro Mayor Jason Resseman raises his hands in celebration, at a Sept. 24 ceremony celebrating the substantial completion of a project to rebuild the Lanesboro Dam. The project included improvements to the city's hydroelectric generating facility.

Lanesboro: see page 7 please

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With Overhead School, our hands-on training tradition carries on



When working close to others, masks have become part of a lineworker's personal protective equipment, as this photo from the recent MMUA Overhead School shows.

MMUA held its annual Overhead School Sept. 15-18 at our Training Center in Marshall. The school was held along with our partners, the Minnesota Rural Electric Association and American Public Power Association.

General sessions were held indoors on the first and last day. With ample space available, we were able to 'social distance.' Attendees were required to wear masks while indoors and when working together outside in close proximity, including in aerial double buckets.

A Tuesday afternoon roundtable discussion on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic started the program. Small-group discussions covered various topics pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic and the response to this ongoing reality.

A concluding general session

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State determines how to account for ultimate COVID-19 impact

by Steve Downer

While it may be too soon to determine the ultimate financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and response, it is not too soon to determine how to account for those impacts.

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) opened a docket on the matter and Sept. 24 set the course for Minnesota's state-regulated utilities. While these guidelines

do not apply to locally-regulated municipal utilities they may be of interest.

Minnesota's state-regulated electric and gas utilities petitioned the MPUC for "Authorization to Track Expenses Resulting From the Effects of COVID-19 and Record and Defer Such Expenses Into a Regulatory Asset."

The MPUC sought answers to the following questions:

- Are the accounting methodologies proposed by the electric and gas utilities for tracking costs, revenues and grants incurred or received reasonable? Are cost and revenues clearly identified and clearly within specific categories?
- Are there any conditions or further caveats that should be considered related to the Commission's granting of authority to establish regulatory assets?

- Should the Commission request information on the financial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the utilities?

The MPUC granted the utilities' joint petition for accounting purposes and required utilities to track costs and revenues, and delegated authority to its staff to continue to track the issue and take other actions.

COVID: see next page please

COVID:

continued from front page

The COVID-19 accounting period begins on March 13, 2020, the date Gov. Walz declared states of emergency due to the pandemic. Since March, various state and federal government officials have issued guidance, recommendations and utility-specific requests with regard to COVID-19.

The MPUC on May 22 granted the utilities' request for deferred accounting and required the utilities to track costs and revenues or grants incurred or received as a result of the pandemic. The May 22 Order also delegated

authority to the Executive Secretary to modify and vary procedures and deadlines, including the procedures and deadlines in this and subsequent orders.

Xcel said it believed the goal of the MPUC docket "should not be to identify and track each and every incremental impact across the range of FERC accounts. Rather, the intent should be to identify incremental cost impacts caused by the pandemic, organized in a way that allows parties to understand them, that are reasonable to bring forward for review at a later date."

Xcel Energy said the financial impacts of COVID-19 on

the Company are likely to fall within four broad categories. These include: Deferred COVID expenses; Total Accounts Receivable; Accounts Receivable - 60+ days past due and; Accounts Receivable - 90+ days past due.

As a pandemic response, the utilities made several operational changes with cost implications. Some of the changes are expected to result in incremental costs, like the purchase of personal protective equipment (PPE), technologies associated with remote work, and costs related to other safe working practices, such as distancing; costs to sanitize and deep clean facilities; overtime or contractor costs due to quarantined employees and other circumstances related to the pandemic. Other responses may result in reduced costs.

Xcel Energy said it believed it is premature to report preliminary known costs or estimated costs related to the pandemic, and the appropriate next step is to achieve alignment around the financial impact categories sug-

gested by the utilities.

Minnesota Power supported this approach. It noted it has taken several actions to mitigate costs, including enhancing its low-income affordability (CARE) program, which MP believes is one factor in the lower number of residential customers with late payments and arrears balances.

CenterPoint Energy (CPE) suggested that the need for an all-inclusive list of possible impacts is not warranted. It recommended utilities file quarterly reports for each fiscal quarter with a one-month lag from the end of each quarter.

Most of the utilities stated that they will track uncollectible expenses with direct relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, and delineate how the expenses are related.

Xcel Energy reported 90+ days past due accounts of \$36,780,693. CPE had the next highest total in this category, of \$7,841,604.

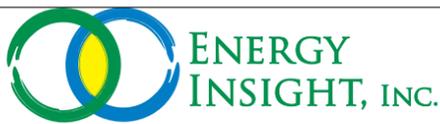
Otter Tail noted that it has

been significantly impacted by the lowered demand for oil since a major Otter Tail customer is a pipeline (accounting for more than 30 percent of Otter Tail's Minnesota energy usage).

Minnesota Power stated that it is having revenue impacts from the loss of industrial customers. MP noted, "[t]he following customers have announced either a partial or indefinite idling: Minntac, Keetac, Hibbing Taconite, Northshore Mining Company, Blandin and Sappi. As of June 9, 2020, Verso announced the indefinite idling of its Duluth mill."

Since recovery of deferred COVID expenses will probably not be authorized for individual state-regulated utilities until they submit their next rate case, the passage of time will allow for more certainty regarding final amounts for each utility, especially with respect to bad debt.

The MPUC docket number is E,G999/M-20-427.



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Otter Tail Power plans to build 50-MW solar plant at site of shuttered Hoot Lake coal plant

Otter Tail Power Company plans to build a nearly 50-megawatt (MW) solar farm on land around the soon-to-be-retired Otter Tail Hoot Lake Plant in Fergus Falls.

The project, dubbed Hoot Lake Solar, will include around 170,000 solar panels. A number of local and state regulatory approvals are

needed, and the Midcontinent Independent System Operator Inc., will need to authorize interconnection to the transmission system.

If the project is completed, Otter Tail Power Company projects that up to 35 percent of its energy will come from renewable sources.



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Pandemic or not, Association work must be moved forward, somehow

I visited a member utility Sept. 15—the first time since February. The year started well enough, with a productive swing through northwest Minnesota and then time with people in February, at MMUA meeting and training events.

Then came March. And you know that story all too well.

Who among us thought in March that we would be where we are today? This situation is a particularly vexing problem for an association. Our basic work—if you consider MMUA's name—is to *associate*. We still can, but it is harder, and less satisfying, when you are locked down, or distancing, or masked.

The member I visited on the 15th has a new city administrator, a new electric superintendent and a new billing clerk. I was fortunate to run into the administrator outside on the sidewalk, as she took a look at a street project underway right in front of city hall. At least she and I can put a name with a face now.

Entering the shop through the side garage door, the superintendent and billing clerk were meeting. A tandem like this is so common, and so important, in the MMUA membership. My impression of the people was good, and they seemed to be working well together. This is also a typical observation. The clerk and I each took a moment to drop the mask for a moment, so we could see what the other's face looks like, before covering up again. I handed out my cards, we talked a bit, and I was off again, to let them attend to business.

When I first started with MMUA, I received a report that a member was unhappy. I went out to meet with the person, in their office. After a few minutes of listening to his concerns, and taking a few notes, the man's face bright-

ened a bit, and the conversation moved on to other topics. We eventually had lunch at a café down the street, and I left on a good note. It may be going too far to say we ended as friends, but we were certainly friendly and I always enjoyed a visit to that utility (and still do).

We sometimes have to call a member and ask them to respond to a legislative or regulatory issue. I found this was much easier to do if I could 'put a name with a face.' Maybe it is just me, but I felt a lot better calling somebody and asking them to do something—something that might be a little uncomfortable for them—if I had spent time visiting with them in their city. Beyond that, you just don't get a sense of a place, or a person, without a visit.

With the onset of the pandemic, that sort of associating has become more difficult. People are concerned, and rightfully so. Providing basic necessities like clean water and reliable electricity are essential to a functioning modern society. Given that, it



You will still find municipal power plants by driving to a water tower. This particular example is found in Melrose.

seems only prudent to quarantine yourself—to the extent possible—when your job is now officially deemed 'essential.'

(Cholera outbreaks and devastating fires were among the reasons cities started to provide water service. Electricity was needed to pump water. Those two services still do go hand in hand. It is no accident that you can often find a municipal utility at the water tower, and the fire de-

partment next door.)

The current difficulties of meeting with other people doubly impacts MMUA—a basic function of ours is to train and meet. How sad was it that we were unable to meet this summer! When will we be able to meet again? As Minnesota's state of emergency drags into its seventh month, this question hangs heavy.

But the Association is mov-

ing forward. We broke the ice with the Generation School in July. The Summer Conference was 'virtual,' but our people met again, in person, in September with the Overhead School. Attendance was down. That's not surprising for a couple reasons. One is that there is concern over catching and spreading the virus. And with the re-thinking of operations and necessary changes taken earlier in the year by our member utilities, there is no doubt a lot of work to catch up on.

But we met, and we will meet again. Along with all the other personal protective equipment so familiar to the utility worker, we wore masks at the Overhead School, when prudent. We distanced. The legitimate health concerns and resulting restrictions on normal human conduct left the interaction different at times, but we conducted the necessary training in the best way we possibly could.

The way forward is murky, but we are moving forward.

- Steve Downer



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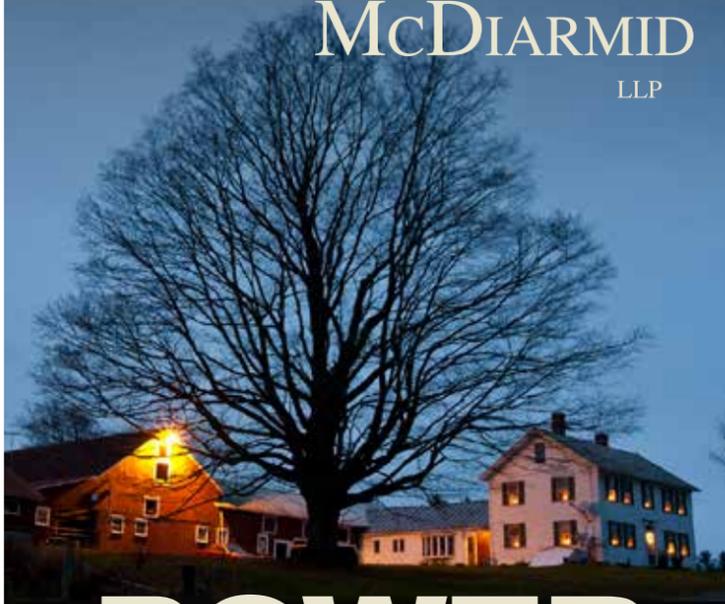
United Way offers help for past due utility bills

The COVID-19 Housing Assistance Program provides payments to maintain housing stability for renters and homeowners. To qualify, Minnesota households must have an income at or below 300 percent of federal poverty guidelines and an eligible expense (including utility bill) that was incurred after March 1, 2020 that is past due. One or more of these payments must be owed due to a COVID-19 related issue.

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Eloise Thorson's coming retirement part of Firstline Supervision changes

In Minnesota's municipal utility world, a few people are known with just a first name.

Eloise Thorson is one of them.

She is well-known to municipal and rural electric people throughout the state, as instructor of the FirstLine Supervision program, a training program for supervisory personnel.

The FirstLine program, offered through Central Lakes College (CLC), started in February 1988. Since 1996, Eloise has been the primary program instructor, which has involved over 500 municipal personnel.

According to MMUA records, the breakdown in numbers includes:

- Graduates: 396 (through March 2020)
- Active Students: 66 (of the active students, 18 graduates are expected this fall.)
- Inactive Students: 53.

Eloise has been semi-retired from Central Lakes College for a few years, but continues to work with MMUA. She is planning to fully retire from teaching soon, to the

family farm near Browerville.

"It's the end of an era," said MMUA Director of Administration and meeting planner Rita Kelly. "I'll miss working with Eloise."

While she has conducted training seminars with a wide range of clients, Eloise said she always liked working with people from the municipal utilities and electric cooperatives the best.

She called the people who work for these organizations the "heart and soul" of Minnesota. People who work for municipals or cooperatives are much alike, she said. Many have worked together while repairing storm damage or simply during the back-and-forth of running a small utility in Greater Minnesota.

"They're all good community members," she said, with so many active as coaches, in local government, on church boards, and in all the other ways that knit communities together and keep them active.

Over the course of the two-year FirstLine program, Eloise said she really got to know



Eloise and Michael Thorson (center) and family in 2014, receiving the University of Minnesota's Farm Family of the Year award.

the people a little bit, and still enjoys running into them as she is out and about with farmer's markets.

"Those kinds of things from life cross over," she said. "It's been a fun ride."

Pandemic may affect changes

With Eloise fully retiring soon, the rising cost of the FirstLine materials, and restrictions in place as part of the pandemic response, changes are coming. By fall 2021, MMUA projects to be

down to 27 people left to finish the program. We are planning to go back to two sessions by then—one in Plymouth and one in Brainerd.

Limited classroom space due to COVID-related physical distancing requirements leaves room for only two new students this fall. Another session has been tentatively added at Brainerd to accommodate additional new students, for the two-year program.

It may be best to phase the

program out now, Kelly said, while we can manage a transition rather than having it forced on us.

MMUA plans to provide sessions for Fall 2020, Winter 2021 and end in Fall 2021. This should give existing students the ability to finish the program and not have it dropped midway. From this point forward, MMUA will not accept any new students.

CLC does have another program, which MREA is offering on-line. With a long-standing commitment to in-person, hands-on training, MMUA is considering its options, and plans to have something in place to offer new students in 2021.

The Thorsons

Eloise and her husband Michael operate a 320-acre farm near Browerville. Over the years they transitioned to raising vegetables and fruits and sell their produce at farmer's markets in central Minnesota.

Karl and Erik Thorson, twin sons of Michael and Eloise, help as they can. Michael and Eloise are blessed with five grandchildren.

Michael has served on the Todd-Wadena Electric Cooperative Board, Great River Energy Board, North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Co-ops, Todd County Economic Development Board, and MN Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association.

Along with working as a customized training representative for Central Lakes College, Eloise has been involved with 4-H, Todd County Extension Committee, Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, and the Lakes Area Growers Association. Both Michael and Eloise are active members of Faith Lutheran Church.

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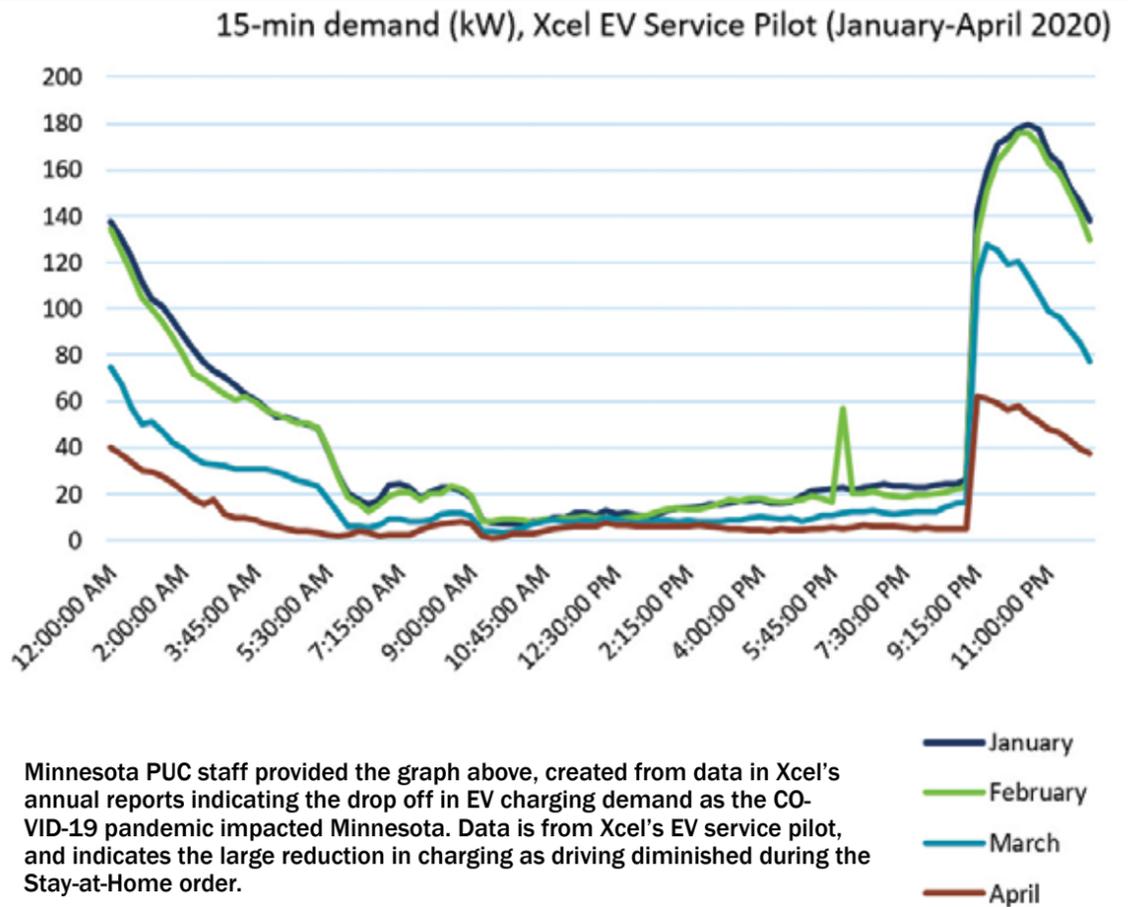
As miles driven plummet in pandemic, Xcel adjusts residential EV pilot program

A pandemic-related reduction in miles driven led Xcel Energy to request two changes to its Residential EV (electric vehicle) Service pilot program. The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) Sept. 24 granted the changes.

Customer driving behavior experienced significant declines following Governor Walz's late March Stay-At-

Home order. Because of that, Xcel indicated customers may not be seeing the benefit of the pilot, as assumptions were based on pre-pandemic driving behavior.

The Stay-At-Home order impacted customer enrollment as well, due to the closure of auto dealerships, a major source of pilot participants. Originally, the pilot was intended to run for three



years, with customers enrolled in a 24-month contract.

To gauge the impacts of the pilot without the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Xcel requested to add an additional year to the pilot term. Expanding the length of the pilot by one year also allows up to 50 new participants to join, up to a total of 150. Xcel will maintain the 24-month

term for new participants. Existing participants will be given the option to extend their pilot term by one year, to align with the new overall pilot program length.

The EV pilot attempts to reduce the upfront expense of a secondary meter, instead using the embedded submeter in a Level 2 EV charger to record consumption.

All parties involved in the discussion and Xcel agreed on the modifications, and regulatory staff also recommended approval.

A group of large industrial customers has appealed the Commission's EV pilot decision, and is currently awaiting a decision at the Minnesota Court of Appeals.

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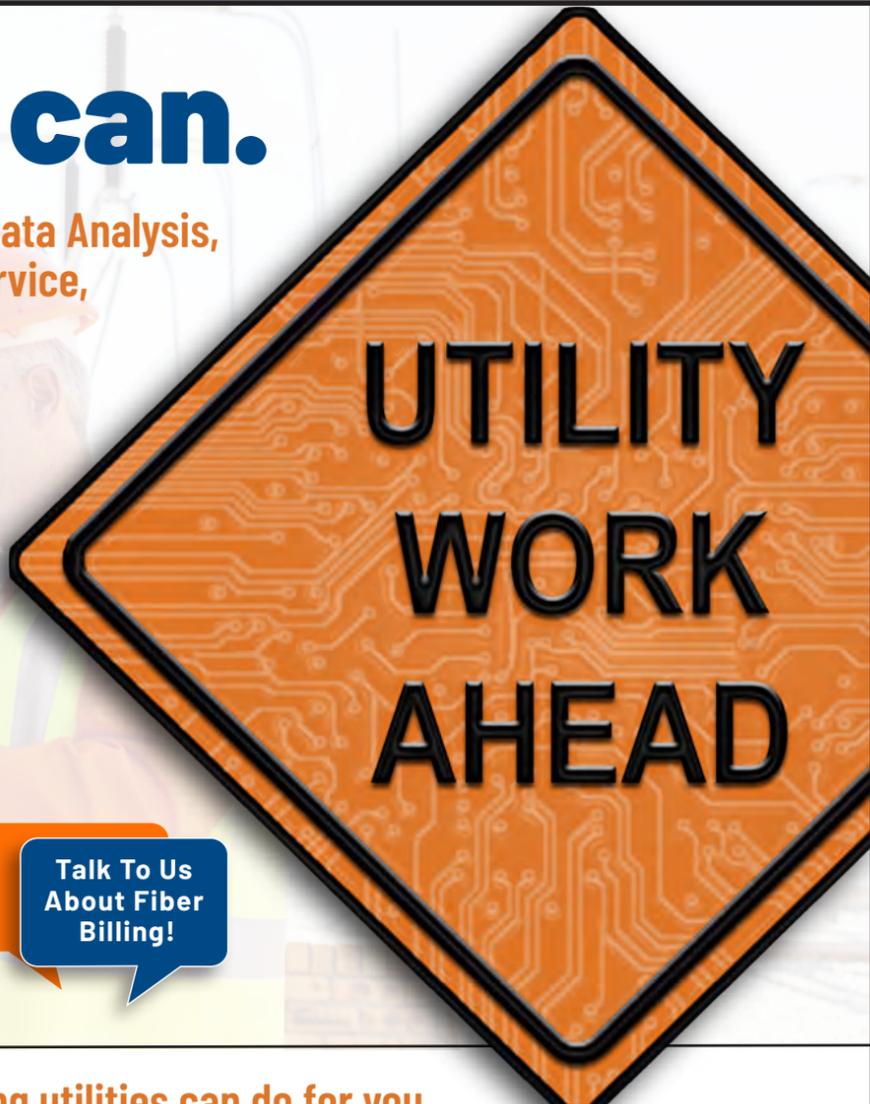
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RPU teams with county and community action agency to offer relief to residential customers

ROCHESTER, MN – Rochester Public Utilities (RPU), through a partnership with the city of Rochester, Olmsted County, and Three Rivers Community Action, is providing utility bill relief for qualifying residential customers.

The CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act enacted on March 27, 2020, has appropriated \$150 billion to the CRF (Coronavirus Relief Funds), which can be used towards paying customer utility bills that in-

curred during the period of March 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020. Rochester has already received over \$8.8 million CRF dollars from the State.

The Rochester City Council approved a plan for RPU to work with qualifying residential customers to utilize \$187,500 for utility bill relief.

The important first step for customers to take is to work with local partners Olmsted County and Three Rivers Community Action to take advantage of their financial resources. This is necessary because the RPU funds are intended to be a supplement to the County or Three Rivers programs for those that do not qualify for their assistance.

In order to get utility assistance from RPU, a prior application to the County or Three Rivers should be made.

The County and Three Rivers have new sources of funding that may be more flexible to help cover additional costs such as deposits and delinquent expenses for utilities. Once applications are submitted with both of those partners, an application can be submitted through RPU

for the utility bill relief. The application, program details, and FAQs can be found on the RPU website (www.rpu.org).

“We’ve listened to our customers and understand that tough financial choices are having to be made by families right now. RPU staff are ready to help our residential customers who could use the financial support available to help pay their RPU bill,” said Krista Boston, RPU Director

of Customer Relations.

The launch date for this program was September 8, 2020. Applications must be submitted for approval by October 16, 2020.

Due to limited funding, applications will be processed on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Full program details, applications, and eligibility requirements can be found on the RPU website.

Austin Utilities extends relief effort

Austin Utilities (AU) has taken actions to provide some relief to its customers and local business members. AU has postponed late fees and have continued to defer disconnects for non-payments since March. These changes, as of mid-September, represent savings to customers through rate and fee reductions of \$299,142.

AU experienced a slight reduction in customer usage during the pandemic compared to its 5-year usage averages. To accommodate for the customer reductions and

related revenue loss for the utility, AU made budget adjustments in the amount of \$831,000.

COVID-19 gave AU reason to accelerate plans that would allow customers to do business with their utility remotely without having to come to the office. AU is finalizing testing for online applications, a customer chatbox on its website, and made improvements that allow more access to programs like budget billing.

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Shepherding the Lanesboro project through the process were numerous local policymakers and city staff, including former city administrator Bobbie (Torgerson) Hillert (left) and current administrator Michele Peterson.

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State Senator Jeremy Miller (R-Winona), Representative Greg Davids (R-Preston) and Lanesboro Public Utilities General Manager Jerod Wagner, from left to right, at the dedication ceremony. Miller is President of Senate; Davids a former chair of the House Taxes Committee.



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Lanesboro:

continued from front page

build the 'high hazard' dam in a historically accurate way.

The gravity-arch dam is one of only a handful of its design left in the U.S. The dam and diversion channel feed the municipal hydroelectric plant, which supplies approximately 10 percent of the city's electric use.

The dam, not surprisingly, had deteriorated over the years. Its inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places complicated the process of repair.

To relieve the hydraulic pressures on the upriver side of the dam, crews built caissons which were then filled with a riprap material. These structures remain but are hidden from view under the water level.

For more on the Lanesboro dam and hydro plant, turn the page!

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The Lanesboro Dam spans the Root River. A city campground is located behind the dam, and the hydroelectric diversion channel is visible at right.

photos by Steve Downer

When private operator failed, Lanesboro voters opted for Public Power option

Editor's note: Much of the information in this article first appeared in the October 1995 edition of Hydro Review.

The Lanesboro Company of New York City founded the city of Lanesboro in 1868. The company also built the Lanesboro Power Dam. The tourist industry envisioned by the town founders didn't materialize (at that time), and water powered three large flour mills.

In the early 1890s, a La Crosse, Wisc., company restructured a 1,000-foot-long canal from the lake behind the dam down to the lower Root River, and built the Lanesboro Electric Power Plant on the canal. Beginning

in 1895, two units generated 240 kilowatts (kW) each.

At first, the Lanesboro power plant powered the town's street lights. Electric lights spread to stores, and by 1900 spread to residences.

But there was a problem: the power plant was administered from the developer's offices in La Crosse, and no one in Lanesboro appreciated an absentee owner, particularly when the plant broke down. In 1903, the citizens of the village of Lanesboro in a special election approved the issuance of \$6,000 in municipal bonds: \$2,500 to buy the plant and water rights and \$3,500 to make repairs and improvements.

The Lanesboro hydro plant and two diesel generators added in the 1920s remained sufficient for the city's power needs for more than a decade. But street and residential lights were followed by toasters, refrigerators, and stoves. In 1925, a second hydro unit, featuring a 180-horsepower Francis turbine with an 18-inch runner, was added to the plant.

Power demand continued to increase. Because the hydro plant was at its maximum output, all new power demands in the town were met by purchases from others.

In 1967, operational prob-

lems forced Unit 2 at the hydro plant to be taken out of service. A decade later, the reservoir behind Lanesboro Power Dam was drawn down to make structural repairs. With Unit 1 off line, the city decided to rehabilitate the unit, which was experiencing oil leakage from the bearing lubrication system.

By the early 1990s, Lanesboro hydro was adding only a few hundred megawatt-hours each year to the city's grid. The hydro plant primarily used as a peaking plant, usually during the winter. The one remaining turbine was refurbished, and with the improvement the plant pro-

duced as much electricity as water and water permits allowed.

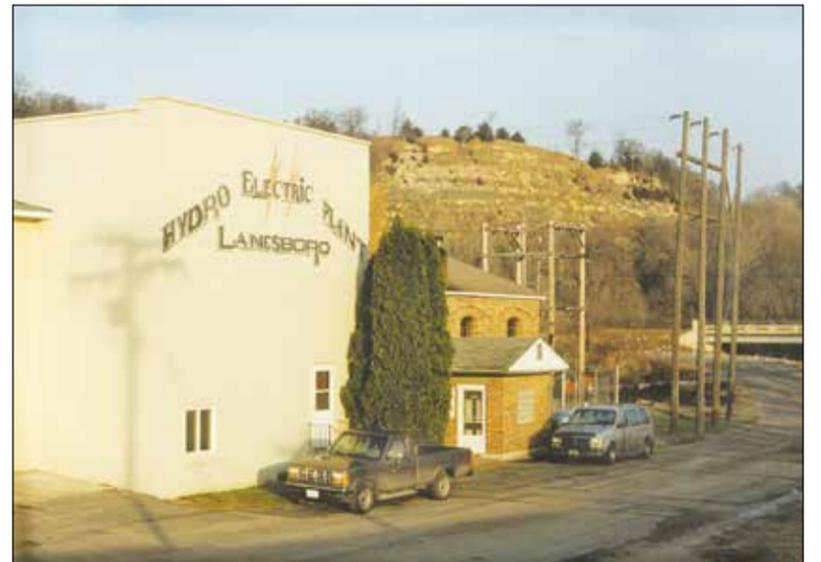
The plant is on the National Register of Historic Places and, more importantly, a part of the Lanesboro Historical District, an area of restored shops, office buildings, and residences. The tourists envisioned by the town's founders now flock to Lanesboro.

As the Lanesboro Village Council stated in 1917 in *Weekly*, "Developing our water power, which is our big asset, to its full capacity will be the one big factor in old Lanesboro's welfare and its future development."

How right they were!



Operation of the diversion channel gates (at left) has been mechanized as part of the improvements. A SCADA system has also been installed to optimize gate operation with river flows.



Tucked away across the river from the city's main street is the Lanesboro hydroelectric plant. This springtime picture was taken in the early 1990s. The portion of the plant in the foreground, which houses a diesel generator, has since been repainted. At right: a mechanical Woodward hydroelectric turbine governor.



Overhead:

continued from front page

was held Friday morning, on Becoming a Safety Leader & Building a Safety Culture. This presentation was designed to help develop the foundation of creating a safe working environment through understanding and communication. Participants were encouraged and given the tools to become a safety leader.

While it is good to bring everybody together in general sessions, the heart of the school is the multi-session class. Outside on the training field, participants rotated through four hands-on sessions. These included:

Session 1: Line Design

Understanding why overhead lines are designed the way they are can eliminate a lot of confusion and minimize questions. Calculating guy lead, line angles, clearances, and other topics were covered, as well as combining new construction to existing outdated powerlines.

Session 2: Overhead Maintenance

Participants practiced several maintenance scenarios. Becoming proficient at system maintenance while adhering to all safe work practices and methods—such as proper cover up and the use of tailgate forms—was the primary goal. Scenarios were presented that participants were instructed to repair/fix.

Session 3: Rigging and Knots

Rigging and tying knots properly are critical skills for a lineworker. This session covered knots and rigging used in all aspects of line construction and maintenance. Achieving mechanical advantages with rigging principles was also covered.

Session 4: Advanced Rubber Gloving

This class is designed to challenge lineworkers to improve or enhance rubber gloving skills, focused on “working it hot.” Participants were asked to develop a safe strategy to approach the task of replacing the crossarms on a double circuit 3-phase pole.



Lineworkers working from double buckets, or whenever in close proximity, wore masks as part of their protective equipment.



Social distancing was the order of the day, including at this training station on Rigging and Knots.



One of the school highlights is the opportunity to practice Overhead Maintenance with utilities from around the state.

Additional class objectives included:

- Preparation for rubber glove work
- Identifying hazards specific to rubber gloving
- Understanding Minimum Approach Distance (MAD) and setting up a safe work zone
- Using tailgate forms to identify hazards associated with the job
- Demonstration of proper tools and proper use

- Blocking automatic reclosing (hot tags)
- Truck operation/set up.

Our numbers were down somewhat from previous years, no doubt due to a variety of issues around the pandemic. A total of 29 lineworkers from member utilities attended. One positive from the reduced numbers is the increased attention received by each participant. In the end, we conducted our training under the most realistic

conditions possible.

We thank all the participants for coming and the utilities that sent them.

Instructors

- Line Design - Jeff Becthold, MRES and Clark Backstrom, Brainerd
- General Maintenance - Scott Thoreson, Elk River
- Rigging & Knots - James

Monroe, MMUA

- Advanced Rubber Gloving - Tony Mead, Marshall and Eric John, Moorhead

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Larry Koshire, prior General Manager for Rochester Public Utilities (RPU), was approved as Interim Utilities Manager of **Shakopee Public Utilities** (SPU) at the Sept. 21 commission meeting.

Koshire served as General Manager of RPU for 17 years, retiring in 2014. Rochester is the state's largest electric municipal utility with combined (electric and water) revenues of \$180 million annually. Prior to RPU, he was the general manager for Muscatine Power and Water, Muscatine, Iowa.

Koshire graduated from the University of Minnesota Institute of Technology and

Around the State



is a registered Professional Engineer in Minnesota and Iowa. He is a senior member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE) and is active in numerous state and national boards, committees and professional organizations.

A \$200,000 community endowment fund has been established in **New Ulm** by the children of Dr. James and Jane Seifert. The New Ulm Area Foundation will help

administer the fund.

Dr. Seifert, a dentist, for decades was mayor of New Ulm and also served on the Public Utilities Commission.

New Ulm is also receiving a share of the Volkswagen air permit violation money and has set aside five parking lots in a city-owned lot for electric vehicles. New Ulm will receive one fast charger and two Level 2 chargers. The chargers will be owned by a third party and will be a small commercial customer of New Ulm Public Utilities.

The city currently has two Level 2 charging stations across the street from utility headquarters. They were installed in October 2017 and as of mid-September had been used 629 hours.

As of Sept. 15, past due electric accounts at Moorhead Public Service totaled \$1.4 million. The utility is sending out calls and urging customers to seek financial aid from a local community action agency. Of the past due accounts, 953 were four months or more with an average outstanding balance of \$1,500. Another 1,227 customers had accounts past due by 30 days or more.

The utility has 21,000 customers with annual revenue of \$25 million.

Sleepy Eye utility crews helped with a local effort to erect eight flag poles along a lake walk. Each pole is topped with an American flag. A second flag flies underneath—one for each of the five military branches, the POW flag and state and city flags.

Funds for the project came from donations from the local servicemen's and women's fund.

Scott Hautala, formerly of Hibbing, is the new general manager at **North Branch Municipal Water & Light**.

Brenda Nielsen accepted the City Clerk/Treasurer position in **Truman** and began with the city on Aug. 31. A certified grant writer, she comes to Truman from the City of Trimont. Brent Brown is the new Truman utilities superintendent and Truman native Thea Boesch is the new deputy clerk and utility billing clerk.

Meanwhile, Taylor Varpness has joined the utility crew at the **City of Tyler**.

Following an exposure to COVID-19, **Willmar Municipal Utilities** on Friday, Sept. 11 immediately closed its lobby. The closure was to remain in effect until at least

Sept. 25. A media release noted various payment options still available to customers.

The **Hutchinson Utilities Commission** (HUC) plans to continue with the second phase of its customer rate restructuring plan. The restructuring is in response to a 2017 cost of service study that was conducted by an outside firm, which is common for utilities and the basis for setting rates. The purpose is to ensure revenue through monthly customer bills is enough to cover costs and to identify subsidies between customer classes.

Following the study, HUC set out on a six-year restructuring plan for its electric division and a nine-year plan for the gas division. The goals of the plans are to make its customer classes more equitable, so each class is paying its fair share, and to better align the costs of running the utility with monthly revenue. HUC does that by aligning the utility's fixed costs with the fixed charges customers pay. The changes are revenue neutral, which means the utility is not taking in any more overall revenue than it already was.

see facing page



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Flags were snapping in the breeze one September morning along Hwy. 15 in Truman.

Around the State



continued from previous page

The first two-year phase of the restructuring plan was in 2018 and 2019. At the end of those two years, HUC reevaluated the plan, and at its Aug. 26 meeting approved a resolution to move forward with the second phase of the plan over the next two years, beginning Oct. 1.

The Hutchinson City Council voted on a resolution

MPUC accepts OPU, MPS territory transfers

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission recently approved joint requests to update electric service territory records, one involving Owatonna Public Utilities (OPU) and one involving Moorhead Public Service (MPS).

OPU and Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric jointly filed a petition under Minn. Stat. § 216B.44. The petition requested that the three transfer areas be permanently transferred from the cooperative's to the municipal's assigned service area. The transfer areas include approximately 201 acres, one existing commercial customer, and one future industrial customer that is under construction and was taking construction service from the cooperative.

Following technical discussions, and at the request of the customer, the parties agreed to transfer electric service to the one existing commercial customer on June 6. The transfer occurred safely, efficiently, and without technical difficulties.

The Minnesota Geospatial Information Office (MnGeo) and the Department of Commerce requested that the parties provide the legal description of one area that was not included. The Department noted that the parties have agreed on compensation for the permanent transfer of service territory.

The municipal and co-op engaged in technical discussions to minimize any disruption to customers, to avoid unnecessary duplication of facilities, and to ensure a smooth transition of electric service.

The MPUC also approved the joint request of MPS and Red River Valley Cooperative Power Association. This transfer included 6.3 acres and interim service to MPS for one commercial customer.

of approval for the plan at its Sept. 22 meeting.

Residential electric and natural gas customers will see their monthly fixed charges go up slightly, while their consumption rates will go down. HUC plans to have another cost of service study performed in three to five years.

With work complete on its dam and hydroelectric facility, the **City of Lanesboro**, received five bids on a wastewater treatment plant improvement project, with the lowest in the amount of \$7.9 million. The estimated

total project costs are predicted to come in at around \$9.7 million. The city also received \$2.9 million in grant funding, but the engineer estimated it should be eligible for \$4.8 million in grant dollars. Legislative inaction on a bonding bill complicates the council's decision making.

Owatonna Public Utilities directed its customers impacted by COVID-19 to visit 211unitedway.org or call 211 to learn about the COVID-19 Housing Assistance Program.

The program covers past due housing expenses including rent and utility payments.

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- Recognition as an Annual Sponsor in MMUA publications

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- One trade show table

(including power) and two attendees at either the Summer Conference or Technical and Operations (T&O) Conference. Two meeting registrations at either the Summer Conference or T&O Conference.

The total value of the Resource ad, trade show table and meeting registrations for 2021 stands at approximately \$3,700. The \$1,750 sponsorship package is a real value for the involved associate member. In addition, we keep our sponsors in mind as we go through the year, and add value whenever and wherever we can.

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our website, at our meetings, and in our publications.

To sign-up as an MMUA Annual Sponsor, complete the Annual Sponsor form on the MMUA website at Sponsors > Become a Sponsor.

MMUA will also be contacting its current Annual Sponsors and its Associate Members via email.

For more information, particularly related to advertising, contact Steve Downer at sdowner@mmua.org or call 763-746-0702. Questions on meetings should be directed to Rita Kelly at rkelly@mmua.org or 763-746-0707.



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AU goes virtual for Public Power and Public Gas weeks

Austin Utilities (AU) went virtual with its Oct. 4-10 Public Power and Public Gas Week activities.

There were a number of fun events. The utility hid a model-sized replica of an AU service truck. Customers could track it down using daily clues. The finder won a new EnergyStar dehumidifier. Clues were posted daily at on AU's Facebook page and website.

AU also hid 10 utility truck

icons on its website. Customers were invited to send an email to let utility staff know where they found the icons for a chance to win one of 10 AU warmth kits.

Customers were invited by the utility to "come inside virtually and see what we do every day to provide safe and reliable services to our customers. Relax and enjoy the tour from the safety of your computer or smart-phone." Videos were available on AU's

website.

Kids were invited to complete a fun energy-related experiment (with instructions provided by AU). Parents or guardians were invited to send the utility a photo during or after the experiment to receive a 'thank you' package including a treat coupon from a local business.

Customers stopping into the office during October received a free LED 3-way bulb.

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With health and security in mind, Madelia uses grant funds to remodel office

Minnesota's municipal utilities still take pride in providing hometown service, but they are also subject to general trends in society.

Increasingly over recent years, many a municipal utility billing clerk has felt intimidated or threatened by an angry customer. And when that customer can walk in the office and stand over your desk, that threat is very close, and very real.

A number of utilities have taken steps to increase office security over the years. Now, there is a new reason to separate utility staff from the general public: the COVID-19 pandemic.

Madelia Municipal Utilities, with 1,200 customers, sits right in the middle of

MMUA electric members size-wise. And it is remodeling its office to increase security in light of today's situation.

The old entry desk and countertops have been removed in the reception area. New walls have been built and a bullet-proof, ticket-style window installed. Entry into the office is through an interior solid-core door that is electric strike controlled. The old full-glass exterior door is being replaced with a new aluminum entry door with panic bar to meet Americans with Disabilities Act and code requirements.

A sliding glass window is also available to handle transactions between utility staff inside the office and customers outside.



Madelia Municipal Utilities General Manager Chris Trembley and billing clerk Char Sellner showed up the new ticket-style security window, in a socially-distanced manner, prior to its installation.

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Madelia Municipal Utilities office entry and customer service walk-up window are to the right in this photo, with the power plant entrance straight ahead.

The utility's two office staff members—Barb Oakes and Char Sellner get new L-shaped desks to provide a better workspace and better ergonomics.

Frontier transfers MN subsidiaries

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) Sept. 24 approved Frontier Communications Corporation's application for the transfer of control of the company's Minnesota operating subsidiaries to New Frontier Communications Parent, with conditions.

Frontier Communications Corporation subsidiaries involved in the application include: Frontier Subsidiary Telco, LLC, Citizens Newtel, LLC, Frontier Communications of Minnesota, Inc., Citizens Telecommunications Company of Minnesota, LLC, and Frontier Communications of America, Inc.

The Transfer of Control is

Frontier: see page 15 please

The cost of the improvements was estimated at \$25,000. Of that total, \$10,000 will be paid through a safety grant and \$10,000 using City of Madelia CARES Act funds.

Utility staff will continue to mix with customers and

community members outside of the office. But the office remodeling offers workplace safety and security to staff, allowing them to do their jobs with increased peace of mind.

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The federal Energy Information Administration (EIA) reported that in the first two weeks of September, average solar-powered electricity generation in the California Independent System Operator (CAISO), which covers 90 percent of utility-scale solar capacity in California, declined nearly 30 percent from the July 2020 average as wildfires burned across the state.

Wildfire smoke contains small, airborne particulate matter particles that are generally 2.5 micrometers or smaller (referred to as PM2.5). This matter reduces the amount of sunlight that reaches solar panels, decreasing solar-powered electricity generation. As of September 28, California wildfires have burned an estimated 3.6 million acres in 2020, an area about the size of Connecticut.

In July 2020, daily solar-powered electricity generation, which includes generation from solar photovoltaic and solar thermal electric generators, ranged from 104 gigawatt-hours (GWh) to 119 GWh, averaging 113 GWh for the entire month.

Daily solar-powered generation began declining as large wildfires broke out in mid-August, reaching a low of 68 GWh on August 22 before returning to approximately 100 GWh by the end of the month. Solar-powered generation began declining again as wildfire activity rose in September, falling as low as 50 GWh on September 11 as smoke pollution increased.

In the first two weeks of September 2020, solar-powered generation in CAISO was 13.4 percent lower than at the same time a year ago, despite growth in installed solar generating capacity in California.

Since September 2019, California has added 659 megawatts (MW) of utility-scale solar-powered generation capacity, increasing total solar capacity by 5.3 percent to more than 13,000 MW as of June 2020.

Although small-scale distributed solar photovoltaic capacity (such as rooftop solar panels) is not included in the Hourly Electric Grid Monitor solar generation data, small-scale solar accounts for a large share of total solar capacity in California. Small-scale solar capacity in Cali-

continued on facing page

California also increased in the past year, rising 11 percent to 9,800 MW.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler Sept. 28 said California Gov. Gavin Newsom's executive order banning gas-powered vehicles may be unlawful, according to media reports.

Wheeler wrote to Newsom that his order "raises serious" legal and practical questions and argued that it may cause further issues problems for the state's electrical grid.

On Sept. 28, approximately 87,500 Pacific Gas and Electric Company customers in California were without power in effort to avoid starting additional wildfires, according to the Los Angeles Times.

Gov. Newsom previously announced that the state will ban sales of gas-powered vehicles in 2035. He noted the order was necessary for the state to operate on 100 percent renewable energy by 2045.

California would be the first state with such a mandate, while at least 15 countries have already made similar commitments, including Germany, France, and Norway.

California accounts for more than one out of every 10 new cars sold in the U.S., according to industry figures.

Frontier:

continued from page 13

due to a Chapter 11 Plan of Reorganization of Frontier Communications Corporation and its Subsidiaries.

The proposed Restructuring is expected to reduce Frontier's funded debt obligations from approximately \$17.5 billion to approximately \$6.5 billion and reduce its annual interest expense by approximately \$1 billion.

Frontier is a publicly traded Delaware corporation with a total of 99 subsidiaries – 57 direct and 42 indirect wholly-owned subsidiaries, including the Applicants. Frontier states that it is the fourth largest local telecommunications company in the United States, with approximately 18,300 employees serving approximately 4.1 million customers as of December 31, 2019. Frontier currently owns and operates more than 50 incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs) located in 25 states.

Frontier-MN furnishes services in 44 exchanges within Minnesota. Frontier-MN's service territory includes rural and suburban areas, with

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On August 26, 2020, the Bankruptcy Court issued its

Order Approving Plan of Reorganization. Frontier has now secured regulatory approvals or determinations of compliance in Minnesota and six other states.

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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

Upcoming Events

Technical and Operations Conference December 8-10, St. Cloud

This popular annual conference will be held in person, with some changes to the format to ensure proper social distancing. With today's uncertainty, perhaps now, more than ever, we need to maintain our relationships and continue to learn from one another to stay on top of our game!

Tuesday, December 8
6 Strategies to Overcome Leadership Obstacles in a Virtual World
Lisa Haen, Culture Inside Out, LLC

Learn six strategies for learning to adapt to rapid-fire change that bridge the virtual gap and create a stronger connection with your workforce. Lead your team into 2021 with confidence.



Wednesday, December 9
Lessons Learned by COVID-19: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly
Kit Welchlin, Welchlin Communication Strategies

The pandemic has affected just about everything in our daily lives. It may also have inspired us to think differently about our work and how we interact with our coworkers and our fellow citizens.



Those attending will:

- Recognize and discuss ways to adapt to sudden change
- Learn how to recover and build resilience



- Recognize the value of perspective-taking, empathy, and contingency plans
- Learn strategies for staying engaged, connected, and productive during disruption.

COVID-19 Lessons Learned - Roundtable Discussion
Moderated by Mike Willetts, MMUA

This roundtable will focus on lessons learned and offer strategies you can implement as you battle this on-going crisis.

FirstNet - Federal Communications Network
Brian Rolph, AT&T National Business

FirstNet is an independent government authority established by Congress to build and deploy a nationwide broadband network dedicated to First Responders. Learn how this 24/7/365 solution for voice, text and data can benefit your utility.

Tick and Lyme Disease Prevention
Brian Anderson (aka The Tick Terminator)

Minnesota is a "High Incidence" state for Lyme disease. It's important to understand ticks and how to avoid or even prevent bites, to help minimize your risk of Lyme disease.

Technical Specification Manual (TSM) Update
Bob Jagusch, MMUA

Learn about the TSM, what the municipal version will look like, and the steps required to adopt your TSM.

Vendor Product Showcase

Learn about our Associate member's products and services.

Reception & Trade Show

NEW LOCATION: River's Edge Convention Center, Glenn Carlson Hall

Whether you're looking to connect with a current supplier or sourcing new equipment or services, this is the perfect venue to make it happen!

Thursday, December 10
The True Cost of Distractions—A Traumatic Event Detailed From an Incident Survivor
Lee Shelby

Lee will share his personal story because he hopes that by raising awareness and educating employees, we can mitigate distractions and reduce injuries. Safety on the job and fewer injuries means employees and families DO NOT suffer. We all must have a "Brother's Keeper" mentality and approach to the job so that everyone gets home safely.



Issues Round-Up

MMUA Staff will cover a variety of "hot topic" issues. This is your opportunity to hear about the work MMUA is involved in on your behalf.

Meeting location:

Best Western Plus Kelly Inn, 100 4th Avenue South, St. Cloud, MN 56301

Transformer School & Pre-Conference December 15-18 MMUA Training Center, Marshall

Transformer School and the optional Pre-Conference offer the ultimate combination of classroom and hands-on instruction designed to increase understanding of the inner workings of a transformer, appropriate installations and applications for maximum reliability.

With his lineworker background, our Instructor, Scott Meinecke, has a knack for explaining complicated principals so that they are understandable.

Scott has a true passion for the craft and has been training on this topic for more than 25 years!



The pre-conference is intended to serve as a basic or refresher course on the basics of single-phase transformer connections and theory. The course includes classroom and hands-on instruction on topics such as safe work practices, transformer

theory, basic calculations, connections, sizing, and troubleshooting.

Transformer School Overview

Three-Phase Transformer Connections

The Transformer School's three-phase course will start with the basics of transformers, including turns ratios, polarities, calculations, connections, and troubleshooting. Participants will learn about the basic three-phase systems with some basic phasor diagrams and explain the relationship of the phasor to the transformer itself.

Register by Nov. 14 for the best rate!

Hands-on learning at its best! For more information, see the 'Events' calendar at www.mmua.org