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Municipals display sterling qualities at two training events

The MMUA Training Center in Marshall was the hub of the Upper Midwest utility training world Sept. 14-17, as we held the Minnesota Lineworkers Rodeo and our annual Overhead School.

The training extravaganza started with the Rodeo, the morning of Tuesday, Sept. 14. Keen but friendly competition culminated in the crowning of this year's overall champions: Tyler Hanson of Shakopee Public Utilities (SPU) in the Journeyman competition; co-worker Tyler O'Brien of SPU among the quick-climbing Apprentices.

The display of municipal lineworker skill and spirit was followed by the Overhead School, which also displayed our strength. The Overhead School was held along with the Minnesota Rural Electric Association and American Public Power Association.

Sixty-two participants from utilities large and small worked together through the three-day school, which focused on 'mutual aid' response and repair.

Like all MMUA schools, this event featured the most realistic of training environments. A select band of utility workers on Tuesday evening undertook the unusual task of wreaking destruction on an electric distribution system, setting the stage for the next day's mutual aid response.

Damage assessments were completed while crews mustered and communications links were established. At the end of each day activities were discussed, with a final debrief on Friday morning.

Crews did not know what their tasks would be until they received assignments. Job safety was paramount, with a focus on best practices and techniques.

Overhead: see page 8 please



photo by Steve Downer

A flag hoisted for the previous day's Rodeo served as a backdrop for Nate Mensink of RPU, who participated in the Overhead School, held Sept. 14-17 at the MMUA Training Center in Marshall.

Northern municipals affected as Otter Tail seeks to withdraw from plant ownership

Another Minnesota utility has announced plans to divest itself of a long-held coal-fired baseload generating resource.

Otter Tail Power Company (OTP) in early September submitted its Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) to regulatory commissions in each of the three states it serves: Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

As part of the proposal, Otter Tail is seeking to "withdraw," in 2028, from its 35 percent ownership interest in the Coyote Station, a 420-megawatt coal-fired facility, located south of Beulah, N.D.

Otter Tail operates the plant, which opened in 1981.

In addition to Otter Tail, companies with stakes in the Coyote Plant include Northern Municipal Power Agency (NMPA), MDU and Northwestern Energy.

NMPA, headquartered in Thief River Falls, owns a 30 percent share of the Coyote Station, which has been a reliable, impor-

tant part of the agency's power portfolio for the past 40 years. The 12 municipal members of NMPA are: Bagley, Baudette, Foston, Halstad, Hawley, Roseau, Stephen, Thief River Falls, Warren and Warroad, and the North Dakota municipal utilities in Grafton and Park River.

An Otter Tail spokesperson said the company filing was not a decision to retire Coyote Station, as the plant's future "is not ours alone to determine."

OTP said Coyote Station owners continue to collaborate in analyzing data and weighing decisions that will impact the plant and each company's employees, customers, and communities. However, the company said it would move forward with more flexible and economical resource options.

In its preferred resource plan, Otter Tail requested to add dual fuel capability at the company's Astoria Station, a South Da-

Coyote: see back page please

Following court ruling, MP to sell share of Nemadji power plant

Little more than a month after a court ruling that a planned natural gas-fired generating plant was in the public interest, Minnesota Power (MP) announced that it was selling more than half of its share in the plant.

Allete Inc., the parent company of MP, announced Sept. 28 it was selling a 30 percent stake in the Nemadji Trail Energy Center (NTEC) to Basin Electric Power Cooperative. The North Dakota-based electricity wholesaler will reportedly pay \$20 million for the share. MP will retain a 20 percent share.

Dairyland Power Cooperative of La Crosse, Wisconsin will own the majority. MP will continue to lead construction and operation.

The Minnesota Court of Appeals Aug. 23 reaffirmed a Minnesota Public Utilities Commission order that construction

Nemadji: see back page please

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Federal agencies release report on February rolling power outages, gas freeze

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) released a preliminary report Sept. 23 in response to February power outages in Texas and much of the country's midsection.

Although unprecedented in scope, the report noted the fatal February event was "the fourth in the past 10 years which jeopardized bulk-power system reliability due to unplanned cold weather-related generation outages." (Other cold-weather disruptions occurred in 2011, 2014 and 2018.)

The electric outages went hand-in-hand with a precipitous decline in natural gas production.

Widespread freezing temperatures triggered the loss of 61,800 megawatts of electric generation. It severely reduced natural gas production, with the largest effects felt in Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana, which saw a reduction of more than 50 percent compared to average production from Feb. 1-5.

To avoid a complete electric grid collapse, bulk-power system 'balancing authorities' ordered rolling blackouts (reaching into western Min-



Rolling outages from the February event reached into western Minnesota, including the cities of Moorhead and Tyler (pictured).

nesota) that exceeded 23,400 megawatts, during severely cold weather.

In a critical error, most natural gas production and processing facilities surveyed were not identified as critical load or otherwise protected from load shedding. As a result, firm load shed implemented by transmission operators to preserve bulk-power system reliability contributed to the decline in natural gas production. The extent of that decline, said the report, is unknown.

The assessment points to freezing of components and fuel issues as the top causes of electrical generator outag-

es, reduced generation or failures to start. Causes identified affected generating units across all fuel types. Of the 1,045 generating units affected, 57 percent were natural gas-fired units that primarily faced fuel-supply challenges. Other generator types affected were wind (27 percent), solar (22 percent), coal (eight percent) and nuclear (4 percent).

Natural gas production facility loss of power was primarily due to power line outages and firm load shed.

The natural gas system saw the largest ever U.S. monthly production decline. Declines weren't isolated to the country's midsection: most regions saw a sharp decline.

Of the outages and derates caused by fuel issues, 87 percent were natural gas supply issues. Supply issues outnumbered natural gas generation freezing issues 458-86. Natural gas production declined due to wellhead and gathering facility freezing and power outages. Power outages also affected gas processing facilities.

The largest cause of generation outages (44 percent)

was freezing. The largest sub-cause, according to the report, were frozen instrumentation and wind turbine blade icing. Other causes included fuel issues (31 percent) and mechanical issues (21 percent).

In a recommendation that surprised no one, the report said "electric and natural gas industries need to strengthen their winterization and cold weather preparedness and coordination to prevent a recurrence . . ."

Nine key recommendations proposed changes to mandatory reliability standards, including:

- Revisions to require generator owners to identify and protect cold weather-critical components;

- Build new or retrofit existing units to operate to specific ambient temperatures and weather based on extreme temperature and weather data;

- Take into account effects of wind and precipitation in winterization plans;

- Correct action plans for generator owners that experience freeze-related outages; and,

- Ensure the system operator is aware of the operating limitations in the generating fleet so that it can plan mitigation actions.

The presentation of the preliminary findings and recommendations is available online. The FERC, NERC and regional entity staffs will release their final report in November.

- Steve Downer

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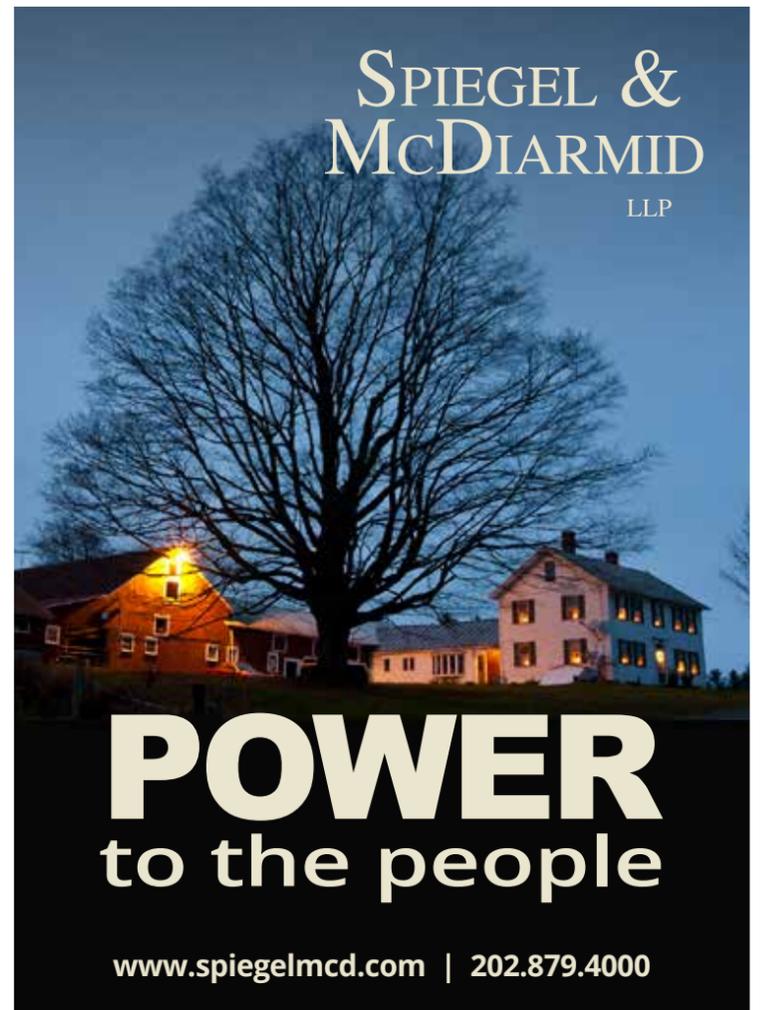
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Adventures ahead for MMUA—five principles will guide our way forward

by **Karleen Kos**
MMUA Chief Executive Officer

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” said Alice.

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.

“I don’t much care where—” said Alice.

“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the Cat.”

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

It has been a couple of weeks since I arrived at MMUA and began working as the new CEO. What an honor to join this great organization at a time of such seismic change in the utilities industry. I couldn’t be more pleased to be embarking on the adventure with all of you—dedicated and talented municipal utilities professionals from all over Minnesota and the Upper Midwest—as well as with our capable staff team.

The next 20 years will bring forth a more dramatic evolution in what we do and how we do it than anyone has seen in a century. Phasing out dependence on coal, increasing reliability and accessibility of renewables, improving technologies, and navigating politics are all in store on the journey ahead. Yet, what customers care most about is basic: do the lights come on when I flip the switch? Does the furnace provide heat when I’m cold? Does water flow when I turn the tap?

Meeting the basic needs of municipal consumers while facing the massive uncertainties of change can make it easy to simplify strategy to “just do the next right thing, keep our stakeholders happy, and everything will be fine.” To a certain extent, no one would be wrong if they approached things that way. Yet, as Alice learned on her adventures in Wonderland, you can wind up in some unfortunate situations if you don’t know where you intend to go and how you intend to get there. No one wants to hear “Off with his head!” from the Queen of Hearts or anybody else while working hard to do a good job for neighbors and friends.

So how do we avoid it without burying our head in the sand and just hoping for the best? Here at MMUA, we face facts and take strategic action. The facts are these:

Our industry is changing.

Our members’ needs are changing.

MMUA needs to be ready to change as well.

With only a few weeks un-

der my belt here, I have little idea yet what these changes may be or how they will come to pass at MMUA. It will require time, thoughtfulness, and the consent of important stakeholders.

In the short run, the Association will continue to advocate for the priorities of municipal utilities, strengthen the things we currently do for you, and listen—to members, the market, and one another. In this spirit, I would like to leave you with five principles that I believe will shape the foundation for MMUA’s continuing and enduring success as your partner in delivering municipal utility services well into the future.

1.) Meeting the needs of the professionals who deliver municipal utilities is the bedrock of our association’s work. Serving these professionals and their cities with high-quality advocacy, essential content, and great products—regardless of the delivery platform—is the organizing principle of our present and future endeavors. We know MMUA members trust

this association to advocate for them and help solve their problems. To this end, I am committed to listening to you, learning from you, and being responsive to you. We will always honor your trust.

2.) We will stay in the trenches with you, delivering exceptional value and showing up when the going is tough. As a nonprofit with 90 years’ experience working with municipal utilities in Minnesota and beyond, MMUA is uniquely positioned to respond to your needs, generate original ideas, and offer cross-platform capabilities to help you succeed at rates that are both fair and affordable. Consultants and for-profit companies often seek partnerships with cities delivering municipal utilities; they have their place. But MMUA has your back.

3.) Relevance is the coin of the realm. Unlike Alice in Wonderland, we care very much where we are going, and we want to be sure we are on the same path as those we serve. To that end, we will thoughtfully seek members’

input on the value they are currently receiving, gaps that already exist, and anticipated future needs. With that information we will build a comprehensive strategy, evolving our current services and adding new ones where it makes sense.

4.) We will keep leveraging new technologies even as we keep things personal. COVID has certainly taught us that it is possible to do a lot more things remotely than we ever guessed before March 2020. However, MMUA’s strength has been its on-site, hands-on personalized approach. Here in Minnesota, we value face time. Whatever else we do—and whatever creative ways we find to do it—you can be sure it will be customized and personal.

5.) We will embrace change as constant and collaboration as vital. I’m sure you have heard the adage that “it’s not the strongest that survive, but those who adapt best to change.” As MMUA leads in an ever-evolving utilities environment, we will explore new ways of working and

partnering with others. As MMUA adapts to changing conditions, we will improve teamwork within the Association and with other collaborating entities. We cannot do it alone, but we can learn from others and get to our new future together.

Over the next year, I will be visiting with many of you. I plan to attend Joint Action Agency meetings whenever possible, and to contact as many members as I can with the offer to visit your communities. If there is a special event coming up you’d like me to attend, please let me know and I’ll do my best to be there. We’ll also be gathering data regarding your needs and the future direction of MMUA through surveys and other information-gathering methods in the coming weeks and months. I hope you will take the time to participate in those projects. Please feel free to call or email me with your ideas. It is my pleasure to serve you, and I look forward to working together as we share this grand adventure.

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MPUC advances project, eyes utility-railroad crossing dispute for a closer look

by Steve Downer

Has a 2016 statute that addressed utilities and railroad crossings solved issues between utilities and railroads?

Apparently not, as railroad crossing fees are the source of a dispute currently under scrutiny by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC). And the MPUC has made clear it intends to get to the bottom of the matter.

The MPUC stopped short of ordering an investigation Sept. 9 after hearing arguments from various parties, including Connexus electric cooperative and the BNSF

Railway. However, it did ask for input, from electric cooperatives and others, on whether or not it should further investigate the issue.

Connexus in April filed a petition to the MPUC to resolve a dispute with BNSF. The dispute dates to September 2020, when Connexus applied to BNSF for permission to install two 127-foot electric conduits, containing three electrical cables each, in BNSF's right-of-way beneath a grade-separated highway crossing near Round Lake Boulevard in the City of Coon Rapids.



Municipal utility communities are no strangers to railroad issues. This particular set of tracks runs alongside U.S. Hwy. 12 and bisects Grove City.

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Connexus notified BNSF that it could install its underground utilities entirely within the public right-of-way without triggering the requirement to pay BNSF the standard crossing fee in Minn. Stat. 237.045.

BNSF responded to Connexus, asserting that it had not submitted a complete application because it had not provided the required crossing fees. BNSF claimed it owned a fee interest in the location since 1887 and that it granted a limited easement to the City for only a grade-separated crossing that did not extend to other uses. BNSF included numerous additional requirements and reserved its right to seek just compensation for damages caused by Connexus' taking of BNSF property, in addition to statutory crossing fees.

Further correspondence between the parties was to no avail.

Several other electric cooperatives filed comments, noted MPUC staff in briefing papers, which contend that BNSF has routinely and knowingly disregarded the requirements of state statute.

The Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) cited several examples where it claimed BNSF's actions illustrated a pattern of conduct that conflicts with the statutes, even after the Court of Appeals upheld the statute in 2018.

MREA argued that BNSF has again attempted to impose additional requirements on an electric utility without even attempting to define any special circumstances that would necessitate such requirements. This conduct so clearly defies the applicable statute, said MREA, that the Commission should consider

seeking civil penalties.

The Minnesota Telecom Alliance argued the Connexus petition is by no means an outlier, but rather is another example of the railroad industry in Minnesota repeatedly and intentionally ignoring Minnesota law and adding delay and expense to the installation of broadband and other critical utility infrastructure.

While the MPUC process to seek further input on statutory compliance will become more clear going forward, the Commission did take action to help Connexus move forward on its project.

In part of a multi-faceted order (not yet available as of this writing), the MPUC found that Connexus had provided a complete application

to the railroad and that the right-of-way issue would be moot with Connexus payment to BNSF of the statutory one-time standard crossing fee of \$1,250. (The Commission was careful to note that this particular finding set no precedent for future cases.)

The Commission did find that BNSF may charge reasonable and necessary flagging expenses set at the actual expense paid directly to flagging employees. BNSF had argued to include additional items, including training expenses.

The Commission directed staff to expedite the order so Connexus could move forward with the construction before the onset of winter.

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Clash between renewable energy and tribal interests appears to be resolved

A clash at the intersection of renewable energy and tribal cultural and spiritual practices appears to have been resolved.

According to numerous sources, the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) and the Upper and Lower Sioux Indian communities in September signed an agreement with Apex Clean Energy on the siting of an industrial renewable energy development near the Jeffers Petroglyphs, west of Comfrey.

According to regulatory documents, the Lower Sioux Indian Community (LSIC) said the Jeffers Petroglyphs and the Red Rock Ridge are considered sacred historic landmarks and active, sacred locations used for ceremonies and spiritual engagement of the LSIC and numerous other Tribal Nations. The Upper Sioux Community said the Big Bend Wind Project will have a negative effect on the viewshed of sacred sites, which are culturally and spiritually significant to the community and its members.

The MHS, which owns the site, also objected, saying nearby wind turbines would diminish the integrity of the petroglyphs, which are carved

into a 23-mile outcropping of quartzite, spanning 160 acres. The historical society and the Indian communities wanted at least an 8-mile buffer between the petroglyphs and wind turbines.

In June, members of the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission expressed misgivings (see July/August Resource, page 11) about Big Bend's plans to locate turbines as close as 5.2 miles from the petroglyphs.

Plans now reportedly call for all but two of the 50-plus turbines to be at least seven miles from the petroglyphs. The remaining two would be 6.5 to 7 miles away. The turbines, according to various reports, will be visible from the petroglyphs, a collection of about 5,000 rock carvings listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The carvings are estimated to be 7,000 years old.

The Big Bend Wind Project is paired with the Red Rock Solar Project, a hybrid renewable energy generation project, which could generate up to a total of 335 megawatts (MW) of electricity (308 MW of wind; 60 MW of solar).

Big Bend Wind, LLC (Big Bend), in November 2020, ap-

plied to the MPUC for a certificate of need, a site permit, and a route permit for an up-to 308 megawatt (MW) large wind energy conversion system and an 18-mile, 161 kV transmission line. Red Rock Solar, LLC filed applications for a certificate of need, and site permit.

The Big Bend Wind Farm is proposed to sprawl across 43,523 acres of land in Cottonwood and Watonwan counties. Big Bend, according to regulatory documents, proposed construction and operation of 55 or 54 wind turbines, each more than 500-feet tall. (Media reports now indicate the use of 52 turbines at 655-feet tall—reportedly higher than any wind turbines now in Minnesota.)

The Red Rock Solar Project is proposed as an up-to 60 MW solar energy generating system located amid the wind project. The transmission line associated with the project will interconnect with the Blue Lake - Wilmarth - Interstate Junction 345-kV transmission line in Martin County.

Big Bend Wind, LLC and Red Rock Solar, LLC are indirect wholly-owned subsidiaries of Apex Clean Energy

Holdings, LLC, of Charlottesville, Va.

The development, scheduled to go online by the end of 2023, would be one of the largest wind farms in Minnesota.

The MPUC, which still must approve the reported settlement, earlier this year ordered the contested case before an administrative law judge. That proceeding now appears unnecessary.

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Aitkin Public Utilities is planning a fast-charging station for electric vehicles as part of a local redevelopment plan.

Linda Olson recently celebrated 50 years with the **City of Elbow Lake**. Olson is an Accounting Technician, Administrative Support Specialist and the appointed Deputy City Clerk.

The **City of Caledonia** broke ground Sept. 27 on a new wastewater treatment facility. The new facility replaces one that's been in use since 1962.

State Representative Greg Davids and the newly-minted Senate Majority Leader

Jeremy Miller participated in the groundbreaking, along with Mayor DeWayne "Tank" Schroeder and councilmembers David Fitzpatrick, Bob Klug (who is also the former city administrator) and Amanda Ninneman.

Last fall, the state of Minnesota approved \$7 million in bonding funds for the project, which is scheduled for completion by fall of 2023.

MMUA members **Rochester Public Utilities, Moorhead** and the **City of St. Peter** made up three of four finalists for this year's 'best drinking water in Minnesota' contest, but Saint Paul Regional Water Services came away with the top prize.

Around the State



The contest was part of the Minnesota Section of the American Water Works Association's annual conference, held Sept. 14-17 in Duluth.

An expert panel judged the four finalists on taste, color, odor and "mouth feel" during a blind taste test. The water was served at room temperature.

St. Paul's municipal water now advances to a national competition.

Austin Utilities (AU) held a public open house Aug. 25 to show the results of recent investments made at the Ellis Water Tower. Originally constructed in 1955, the site received over \$1.3 million in renovations including a full replacement of the building and pumping system.

Participants were able to see inside the new pump-house and talk to staff who run the water system. Free refreshments, including water samples, were provided and water saving devices were handed out to attendees. AU will also be sharing water saving tips.

AU staff was also on hand to visit with customers and talk with media representatives.

The **Marshall** city council Sept. 14 held a public hearing where several residents appealed assessments for a street and utility reconstruction project. The two projects include rebuilt streets and sidewalks and new utility lines. Part of cost was assessed to affected property owners while other costs were paid for from city, sur-

face water management and wastewater funds. Assessments for residential properties were limited to \$5,700, but homeowners incurred additional costs for sewer service lines and driveway replacement costs. Council upheld the assessments by a 5-2 vote. Repayment terms

stretched to eight years at 2.84 percent interest.

The Sept. 1 deadline to find a buyer has passed, meaning a likely demolition of the **Willmar Municipal Utilities** downtown power plant.

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Austin downtown power plant remembered at local 'Y,' which receives big rebate

Austin Utilities (AU) held a private ceremony Sept. 15 to commemorate a remembrance wall installed in the YMCA at the Austin Community Recreation Center. The wall was created to recognize the Downtown Power Plant. The power plant was demolished in 2018, after it had been decommissioned, to make room for the new community recreation building. The power plant and its neon AUSTIN POWER PLANT lighted sign were an iconic Austin landmark for many years.

Mark Nibaur, AU General Manager said, "We had made the move into a new central facility that combined seven buildings at three locations into one. When we were approached to offer the power plant location for a community recreation center it was a perfect fit for the property."

In addition to providing the property for the new building, Austin Utilities paid a rebate to the YMCA at the Austin Community Recreation Center of over \$157,000 for energy efficient lighting and equipment installed in the construction of the new recreation center building.



Mark Nibaur (left) and Kelly Lady (right) of Austin Utilities presented a large energy efficiency rebate check to YMCA Executive Director Diane Baker.

The remembrance wall location was selected due to its proximity to the community room which is available for public use.

The mural includes a collage of photos of the power plant and the following statement reflecting on the public use of the property, "In 1887 this ground was broken to raise a building that would provide public power and water to the community of Austin until 2013. The Austin Municipal Plant was removed in 2016. The 2020 opening of the Austin Community Recreation Center continues the tradition of public service on the site."

A number of local contrac-

tors were used to complete the project. The mock neon sign is powered with LED lighting. "The power plant and neon light were such a presence at this location for many years. The wall is a fun reminder for many of our members," said Diane Baker, YMCA Executive Director.

The Austin Municipal Plant was an iconic Austin landmark for many years. Constructed on the 1888 site of the original municipal water plant, various additions were made to the plant through 1985. It provided the first electrification for street lighting in 1889, and in its prime provided 31 megawatts of power generation and steam

for a district heating system for the community of Austin. It was removed in 2018 due to outdated technology.

Austin Utilities is a munic-

ipal utility serving approximately 12,300 electric customers, 10,300 natural gas customers, and 9,000 water customers.



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Overhead:

continued from front page

Crew scenarios included:

- Proper techniques for switching, grounding and tagging
- Identifying potential dangers and hazards, such as back feed
- Tree trimming in an emergency
- Splicing
- Pole replacement
- Transformer banking
- Transmission/substation repair
- Single and three phase structure damage.

The advanced Leadership class focused on management and system operations in an ongoing mutual aid event. Leadership personnel developed essential skills to work hand-in-hand with MMUA in order to deploy crews needed. Learning opportunities included:

- How to prioritize and organize a large-scale mutual aid response
- Becoming familiar with and leading using MMUA's standardized system for damage assessment and other tools/resources
- Leading/assisting system

operations

- Mapping and prioritizing system restoration
- Managing your critical customer base
- Tracking crews and resources after deployment
- Leading in difficult situations—when to call for help/support; accident/injury situations; stranded crews and equipment breakdown; managing switching, testing and grounding; and
- Managing and mitigating potential dangers (customer's portable generators, debris, etc.)

A municipal utility person could not help but fill with pride at the sight of the gathered utility personnel and equipment, going about their work in the most diligent and professional manner. That sight and this school will be long-remembered by those who participated.

Well done, one and all!

Partial rodeo results have been posted in the Breaking News section of the MMUA website. Rodeo and Overhead photo albums are on the MMUA Flickr page.



The MMUA Training Center in Marshall was the scene of the Sept. 14 Minnesota Lineworkers Rodeo.

SPU proves tough to beat at our Lineworkers Rodeo

MMUA held its annual Minnesota Lineworkers Rodeo Sept. 14 at its Training Center in Marshall.

Tyler Hanson, Shakopee Public Utilities (SPU), won the Journeyman overall competition, edging out co-worker Mike Enright. Finishing third was Tyler Meiners of Rochester Public Utilities (RPU). Each man finished with a perfect score. The final order came down to the time taken to complete the tasks.

Tyler O'Brien of SPU topped the Apprentice competition, followed by a pair of

apprentices from Owatonna Public Utilities (OPU): Ryan Haberman in second and Samuel Bahl, third.

Individual event top finishers included:

Hurtman Rescue

Apprentice: Jordan Stocker, SPU, first place; Ryan Haberman, OPU, second; Samuel Bahl, OPU, third.

Journeyman: Hunter Gleason, RPU, first place; Tyler Hanson, SPU, second; Mike Enright, SPU, third.

Pole Top Pin Insulator Change Out

Apprentice: Ryan Haber-

man, OPU, first; Jordan Stocker, SPU, second; Samuel Bahl, OPU, third.

Journeyman: Mike Enright, SPU, first; Tyler Hanson, SPU, second; Tyler Meiners, RPU, third.

Obstacle Course

Apprentice: Tyler O'Brien, SPU, first; Jeremy Casey, RPU, second; Samuel Bahl, OPU, third.

Journeyman: Tyler Hanson, SPU, first; Mike Enright, SPU, second; Hunter Gleason, RPU, third.

MMUA thanks each of the competitors and the utilities that allowed them to participate and the volunteers that helped make the event a success. Event judges included:

Larry Lamote, MMU, chief judge of the Hurtman event with Jeff Folkens of New Ulm Public Utilities, Dave Hunstad of Hutchinson Utilities and Jeff Becthold of Missouri River Energy Services.

Tony Mead, MMU, Pole Top chief judge, with Steve Johnson (MMU), Trent Hawkinson of Brainerd Public Utilities and Brad Carlson of SPU.

Steve Tiegs, Austin Utilities (AU), Obstacle Course chief judge, along with Brendan Olson of Hutchinson Utilities, Eric John of Moorhead Public Service and Miles Heide, Fairmont Public Utilities.

Auditors were Nate Jansen of MMU and Wade Williams of Fairmont. Bucket truck operators included Jeff Martinson of AU.

Event sponsors included: Border States, FS3 Inc., and Ziegler Power Systems.

Lunch/Refreshments were co-sponsored by Northwest Lineman College and Vermeer/RDO Equipment.

Awards sponsor was Altec. Reception sponsors included Terex and Vermeer/RDO Equipment.

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A maze of wires confronted a lineworker intent on repairing damage.



MMUA Overhead School, 2021

MMUA held its annual fall Overhead School Sept. 14-17. Here are some scenes from this year's training event. Top: A group of lineworkers discussed a project, while two of their group went aloft to make the necessary repairs. More photos can be seen in the MMUA albums housed online at Flickr.



A conference room at the MMUA Training Center was transformed into system operations headquarters.



Communication is a key factor in any mutual aid event. Here, Steve Tiegs of Austin Utilities (right) communicates with headquarters.



An observer took in the activity the morning of Sept. 15 at the Overhead School. 'Storm' damage of the utility system is evident in this photo.

photos by Steve Downer

Reuters reported that the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit on Sept. 7 denied a petition by Spire Inc. to reconsider a ruling requiring the company to shut down its STL natural gas pipeline in Missouri.

The line, designed to deliver up to 0.4 billion cubic feet of gas per day, began operating in November 2019. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) in 2018 authorized the 65-mile, \$285 million pipeline.

The Court said FERC erred when it found a market need for the line despite only one gas supplier, an affiliate of the line's operator, committing to use it.

Spire has requested emergency authorization from

Bits & Pieces



FERC to keep the line operating to avoid gas outages for as many as 400,000 residents in St. Louis this winter. That application is under review.

The road to a 'carbon-free' future might be mapped in national and state capitals, but a variety of detours might arise when it comes time to put those directions into motion.

Here are a few that have cropped up lately:

Evergy has reportedly backed away from ambitious solar resource plans due to

development process issues and increasing inflationary costs, supply chain issues and regional grid interconnection issues.

The utility now plans to retain generating capacity at a Lawrence, Kansas, coal plant to be converted to run on natural gas, despite a previous plan to close the plant.

Evergy has pledged to be carbon neutral by 2045.

According to local media reports, the Gage County (Nebraska) board Sept. 8 took several votes on tougher wind energy regulations, which opponents said may make it nearly impossible for wind energy development in parts of the county.

Proposed changes to draft recommendations, sent to the board by the county's planning and zoning commission, included: setting wind-tower setbacks from non-participating entities (including any federal, state and local recreation areas) at one mile from the property line, and a three-mile setback from villages, churches or schools.

A turbine noise limit of 40 decibels in the daytime, and 37 at night, remain in place.

The Reno County (Kansas) Commission Sept. 14 issued a moratorium on the development of commercial wind farms in the county through the end of the year.

The board also directed the planning commission and staff to draft regulations creating an overlay zone to regulate wind development in un-zoned parts of the county.

Public hearings on both proposals are set for late December.

Local policymakers have wrestled with wind development regulations for months and the county is embroiled in legal proceedings.

The Madison County (Indiana) Planning Commission voted unanimously Sept. 14 to enact a moratorium of six-months, or until a new county ordinance is adopted, on large scale solar projects.

A previous moratorium expired in July.

The Bedford Township (Michigan) board of trustees balked at a solar developer's plan to build on 800 acres of agriculturally-zoned land. The township only allows solar fields within industrial-zoned land.

Pittsburgh-based, Mitsubishi-backed developer Oriden proposed the project.

The Stark County (North

Dakota) commission in September approved a moratorium on energy development for nine months. The City of Dickinson, however, is exploring the possibility of extending city planning authority to enable the project.

The Dickinson *Press* wrote, "The possibility of expansion of planning and zoning jurisdictions by the city is expected to generate tremendous political backlash . . . during a longstanding Enviro-socio-political conflict regarding Marathon and One Energy's

proposed turbine site. The contentious debate surrounding wind energy has become one of the most divisive subjects in North Dakota's western counties, garnering heated public meetings and moratoria in response."

The Stark County action followed Mercer County, which in July adopted a moratorium on all wind-related projects, seen as the model for other counties to follow.



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GRE proposal to sell high voltage DC line to Nexus faces regulatory scrutiny

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) Sept. 9 heard a petition to transfer a portion of the route permit for the Great River Energy high-voltage direct-current (HVDC) transmission line system and associated facilities in Minnesota to Nexus Line, LLC.

The main issue before the Commission was to determine whether Nexus Line, LLC would comply with the conditions of the permit, which was issued 45 years ago. The Commission asked for financial assurances from Nexus and asked for additional information, to be filed within 30 days, before making a decision.

The HVDC line was fiercely opposed when it was permitted and built in the 1970s, with construction obstructed in various ways and vandals toppling towers. In an echo of that opposition, between July 26 and August 13, the MPUC received around 800 public comments.

Environmental groups, which prefer a shutdown of the associated Coal Creek power plant, argued against the permit transfer. They said the process lacked transparency and public engagement.

The record in the docket stretches to June 3, 1976, when the Environmental Quality Council issued a construction permit for the 400-kV HVDC high voltage transmission line to Cooperative Power and United Power Association (which later merged to form GRE). The construction permit serves as the legacy "route permit" for the line;



photo by Steve Downer

The forerunners of Great River Energy fought a pitched battle to build the DC line. Now, 45 years later, the GRE generation and transmission cooperative has proposed to sell it. This picture of a portion of the line was taken recently just west of Buffalo, near the line's terminus.

HVDC converter station; and associated HVDC facilities located in west central Minnesota.

The HVDC system extends from the North Dakota border in Traverse County to the 345 kV Dickinson Substation in Rockford Township, east of Buffalo.

GRE and Nexus are seeking a partial transfer of the construction permit because, after the planned sale of the HVDC system, Great River Energy will retain ownership of alternating current (AC) transmission facilities subject to the permit, including the double-circuit 345-kV HVTL (commonly known as the CDX line) from the Dickin-

son Substation to the existing Coon Creek Substation site in Coon Rapids, the Dickinson Substation; and associated facilities.

Nexus said it would abide by all of the terms and conditions of the permit. It said there is an operations and maintenance (O&M) agreement where GRE will continue to operate and maintain the line. The applicants also provided a copy of the agreement, outlining that GRE would continue to operate the transmission line at National Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) reliability standards and maintain the line to standards outlined in the agreement.

In the permit transfer ap-

plication it was also noted that GRE planned to use the same technicians, engineers and crews that operate the HVDC System today, moving forward under the O&M agreement.

The term of the O&M agreement is for 10 years, with successive one-year agreements. Either party needs to give three-year notice to terminate

the agreement.

Nexus is owned by REMC Assets, LP, a North Dakota limited partnership, which is in turn owned by REMC Group, LLC, a North Dakota limited liability company. Nexus is an affiliate of Rainbow Energy Marketing Corp, a North Dakota-based asset management and energy trading company.

Wadena secures service rights to local hospital it has served since 1923

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission on Sept. 2 approved a joint request of the City of Wadena and Todd Wadena Electric Cooperative to update electric utility service area records.

Wadena picks up exclusive electric service rights to approximately 42 acres and temporary/construction service for one commercial customer, a \$72 million, 125,900 square-foot expansion of Tri-County Health Care. While work was already underway, an official groundbreaking for the facility was held May 21.

The hospital will occupy about 24 acres of the site.

The forerunners of Tri-County Hospital started in Wadena in 1923. That building still stands across from the current hospital, which was opened in 1974. In 2019, initial planning began for the new state-of-the-art facility.

Wadena Electric & Water is providing construction power to the site, which straddled the service territories of the two utilities, on the west side of the city north of U.S. Hwy. 10. The main three-phase transformer is scheduled to be set in October. Plans call for the new hospital to be open in October 2022.

Regulatory documents note that the municipal and cooperative agreed in writing on appropriate compensation regarding the transfer.

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Minnesota Power plans to build 16-location electric vehicle charging network

Minnesota Power (MP) is planning to build a company-owned, 16-location electric vehicle (EV) charging network in its service territory. The company received permission Sept. 23 from the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC), which also approved the company's proposed EV Rate Tariff and its proposed retail rate to be paid by EV charging stations.

MP estimated EV saturation in its service territory would increase from 0.2 percent of light duty vehicles in 2020 to nearly 10 percent of vehicles by 2034. It also concluded the current level of

direct current fast charging (DCFC) infrastructure in its service territory would not be sufficient to support this projected level of electrification.

MP identified the 16 locations based on lack of existing DCFC, population density, travel corridors, and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency criteria including "environmental justice areas of concern."

MP will issue a request for proposals for the construction and identify "site hosts" in each of the target locations. It plans to install 50-kilowatt (kW), 180-kW, and 350-kW chargers. Hosts are asked to

Comparison of MN DC Fast Charger Rates

	MP	OTP	Xcel	3rd Party A	3rd Party B	3rd Party C
On-Peak	\$0.45930	\$0.13383	\$0.52576			
Mid-Peak	\$0.32878	\$0.04899	\$0.39013	\$0.20/min	\$0.30/min	\$0.30/min
Off-Peak	\$0.23304	\$0.00087	\$0.32784			
To Connect	\$3.0-\$7.0	\$3.0-\$8.0	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$4.95
Total	\$13.22	\$7.22	\$9.75	\$6.00	\$9.00	\$13.95

Source: Minnesota Public Utilities Commission

MP Rates Detail

Peaks defined

On-Peak: 3-8 pm weekdays

Off-Peak: All other hours

Super Off-Peak: 11 pm-5 am

EV Customer

Connection Fees

Level 2	\$3.00
DCFC ≤100 kW	\$5.00
DCFC 101-200 kW	\$6.00
DCFC 200+ kW	\$7.00

set aside four parking spaces dedicated to EV parking and 24 hour/365 days a year accessibility. MP will also consider access to amenities like Wi-Fi, restrooms, retail, and other services.

MMUA member electric utilities in the MP proposed DC charger sites include:

- Grand Marais
- Grand Rapids
- Hibbing
- Moose Lake
- Mora
- Virginia

Estimated cost is approximately \$4.9 million over a 10-year period. MP estimated the charging stations could bring in a total annual gross revenue of \$181,841 by 2023.

MP based rates on charging rates at third-party DCFC stations in Minnesota, but with a time-of-use (TOU) component. MP said the most common rate structure was a connection fee plus a per minute rate. MP converted an average of these costs to a starting flat rate of \$0.36/kW, then converted it to a three-part TOU rate using ratio and time periods from its residential rate design proposal.

Carbon capture pipeline hearings held in Iowa

A series of public hearings are being held in Iowa relating to a 2,000-mile long carbon capture pipeline.

The \$4.5 billion pipeline would capture carbon dioxide emissions from ethanol and other industrial plants. The carbon dioxide would be compressed into a liquid form and transported to North Dakota, where it would be injected into underground rock formations.

Minnesota Power also plans to charge a connection fee ranging from \$3.00 per session for a Level 2 charger to \$7.00 per session for DCFC that are over 200 kW.

Each of Minnesota's inves-

tor-owned utilities has taken a different approach to rate design for the prices charged to EV drivers.

MP will make a number of compliance filings in the coming months.

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Municipal utilities benefit from MPUC action on wind farm certificates and permits

Walleye Wind was issued a certificate of need and site permit from the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) by Sept. 17 written order. The project developer, a subsidiary of NextEra En-

ergy Resources LLC, had proposed a 40-turbine, approximately 110-MW project located in Rock County.

The Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, a joint action agency with 12 municipal

utility members, has a long-term power purchase agreement for all energy generated by the project. In its PUC filings, Walleye Wind notes that the successful completion of the project is important to MMPA's renewable energy and carbon reduction goals.

There is no significant transmission line associated with the project. Walleye Wind, LLC will construct a project substation adjacent to Northern States Power's Rock County substation, and the output of the project will enter the electrical grid through a 500-foot intertie line between the project substation and NSP's Rock County Substation.

Walleye Wind has stated that it expects construction to be complete and the facility to be operational by the end of 2021.

Plum Creek also advances

The MPUC Aug. 12 approved a certificate of need, issued site permit with modifications and issued a route permit with modifications for Plum Creek Wind Farm, LLC for an up to 414-megawatt (MW) Large Wind Energy Conversion System and 345-kilovolt (kV) transmission line in Cottonwood, Mur-

ray, and Redwood Counties, north of Westbrook.

Plum Creek Wind, LLC is an affiliate of National Grid Renewables (formerly Geronimo Energy, LLC). The system will consist of 67 to 74 wind turbines ranging from 5.6 to 6.2 megawatts in size and an associated 31-mile 345-kV transmission line.

The 345-kV transmission line would be constructed on single-circuit monopole structures within a 150-foot right-of-way and would connect the wind facility to the existing Brookings-to-Hampton 345-kV transmission line via a new switching station. The proposed project would be located in portions of Cottonwood, Murray, and Redwood counties.

Among the issues raised during the regulatory process, Plum Creek indicated that, due to a preliminary determination by the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) that the proposed project will have an adverse impact to the Common Air Route Surveillance Radar, it had entered into negotiations with NORAD and that commercial operation of the proposed project would not happen until sometime in 2023. Plum Creek indicated

that NORAD would begin testing in September 2021 with results expected in first quarter 2022.

An administrative law judge (ALJ) noted that the analysis of the certificate of need factors represented the greatest area of dispute. Specifically, the Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources (DER) asserted that Plum Creek had not met its burden to show that demand for the project exists.

DER generally argued: that the Minnesota's Renewable Energy Standard (RES) is of diminished relevance in a demand analysis because utilities are meeting or exceeding those goals; that utilities' stated goals to purchase additional renewables do not establish demand for a project; and that Plum Creek did not use reliable information from sources such as approved integrated resource plans (IRP), power purchase agreements (PPA), and transmission reports to establish demand.

However, the ALJ did not agree and ultimately concluded that Plum Creek had satisfied all the criteria set forth in statute and rule and recommended that the Commission issue a certificate of need with no conditions.

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Electrical Line worker/ Water System Operator – Apprentice or Journeyman

Kenyon Municipal Utilities is seeking qualified candidates for the full-time position of Apprentice or Journeymen Line worker/water system operator. The functions of the position include: operation, maintenance and repair of electrical lines, power plant operations work, and maintenance of the municipal water system and components. Qualifications include: Must possess a valid Minnesota Class ("B") CDL with air brake endorsement. Applicants must be a graduate of an accredited electrical line worker training program. Preferred applicants will have three (3) years of lineman experience. Must be able to obtain a Minnesota Class D Water license within 12 months. Must reside within a 25-minute response time of City limits within a 12-month period. 2022 Salary range - \$23.79 - \$30.82 plus benefits depending on training and experience.

How to Apply:
Employment applications, and job description can be obtained at Kenyon City Hall, 709 2nd St. or at www.cityofkenyon.com. Position will be open until filled. Review of applications will begin on October 15, 2021. Questions may be directed utility@cityofkenyon.com. A pre-employment physical, drug screen, and background check will be required.

Power Delivery Engineer
Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency is looking for an electrical engineer to provide engineering support and assistance in the planning and model building activities for the Agency's power delivery system. Starting salary (\$78,000 – \$85,000 per year) depending on education and experience. Benefits include paid time off, health insurance, deferred compensation program, MN State pension, life insurance, and much more.
Primary Responsibilities:
• Compile and summarize the Agency's electrical power system data and load forecasting information for use in power-flow, short-circuit, stability, reliability and facility addition studies of the Agency's power delivery

See top of next page please

system and interconnected transmission system.

- Maintain the Agency's land management, easements, drawings and permitting documents related to the Agency's power delivery system.
 - Provide support and assistance in the Agency's load forecasting, short-term and long-term power delivery planning studies, and power system operations to ensure a reliable electric power delivery system for the Agency.
- Qualifications for the position:*

- Bachelor's degree in electrical engineering or equivalent combination of education and experience.
- Up to three years of related utility experience with Power System Simulator for Engineering (PSSE) software.
- Knowledge of Midcontinent Independent System Operator's Model on Demand (MOD) and web-tool experience preferred.
- Knowledge of Auto-CAD drafting software preferred.
- A valid driver's license required.

• Successful completion of a criminal/consumer background and alcohol/drug use screening required.
Please submit resume to: Sandra K. Feehan (sk.feehan@smmpa.org), Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, 500 First Avenue SW; Rochester, MN 55902
<http://www.smmpa.com>

For a complete and up-to-date listing of our Help Wanted and For Sale ads, please see the News > Classifieds section of our website.

MPUC approves Anoka-Connexus territory filing

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) Sept. 2 approved a joint filing from Anoka Municipal Utility and Connexus, under Minn. Stat. § 216B.39, subd. 3, to transfer of an area located within the city limits of Andover and within the electric service territory assigned to the municipal. This designation was in error, said the parties, and they agreed the area should be properly served by the cooperative.

The parties requested that the MPUC update its official records as to electric service territory boundaries.

The affected area involved approximately 59 acres, in a new subdivision to be constructed, and two existing customers which are served by the cooperative. The parties engaged in technical dis-

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cussions, and because there is no need to construct any electric facilities to complete this change, there will be no

disruption to the two existing customers in this area which are presently served by the cooperative.

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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

Coyote:

continued from front page

kota facility fueled in part by natural gas from North Dakota's Williston Basin, add 150 megawatts of solar at a location yet to be determined, and commence the process of withdrawal from Coyote Station.

Energy market conditions have been evolving over the past several years, said Otter Tail, and are forecast to continue offering low-cost energy opportunities to utilities whose electric generation can quickly react to real-time market conditions, such as natural gas-fired resources.

Otter Tail said it will continue to monitor issues that

could impact its plan, "including changes to the Midcontinent Independent System Operator's capacity construct, evolving energy markets, and current or future federal or state energy laws or regulations including the federal Regional Haze Rule."

By 2023, projections call for Otter Tail customers to receive approximately 35 percent of their energy from renewable resources. The company's target is to reduce carbon emissions from generation resources it owns approximately 50 percent from 2005 levels by 2025 and 97 percent by 2050.

Otter Tail, headquartered in Fergus Falls, serves 230,000 people in Minnesota,

Nemadji:

continued from front page

and operation of the proposed \$700 million power plant, to be built in Superior, Wisc., is needed and that it serves the public interest.

Regulatory analysis found Nemadji less costly than wind or solar resources.

Environmental and ratepayer groups opposed the plant since it was proposed in 2018, saying the threat of climate change is too great to build new fossil fuel infrastructure and that the plant is not needed.

MP has plans to eliminate coal-fired generation from

its electric mix by 2035 and be carbon-free by 2050. The company termed natural gas a "renewable-enabling" power source.

"Renewable sources such as wind and solar are not able to fulfill all of our customers' energy needs on demand around the clock," Chief Operating Officer Josh Skelton said in a statement. "We need reliable, modern energy sources such as NTEC to provide sustainable energy for our region and economy."

The utilities hope to have the plant constructed by 2025 and are awaiting permits from Wisconsin regulators to begin construction.

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Total Distribution:	2044	2047
Copies Not Distributed	46	50
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Upcoming Events

Technical & Operations Conference

December 7-9, Best Western Plus Kelly Inn, St. Cloud

The Technical & Operations Conference (or "T & O") is a not-to-be-missed event for Managers, Crew Leads, Lineworkers and others. This is the perfect venue to join fellow public power professionals to hear interesting speakers on timely topics, participate in discussions, share ideas and connect with friends.



This year's event again features two tracks: one for managers and one for crew leaders. We have time set aside for members to share information and insight on a variety of topics in a roundtable format, along with speakers on a variety of relevant topics. Plus meet with suppliers at the Dec. 8 Trade Show!

This year's featured speakers include:

Michael Melnik, on *The Energized Approach for Creating a Safe, Healthy and Productive Workplace*

There are 3 certainties in life—Death, Taxes . . . and Change! Organizations spend an abundance of time, money and resources to drive positive changes in the workplace. All too often these efforts fall short of expect-



tations. There is hope! In most cases the problem isn't the change itself, it's the environment into which the change is introduced and the methods used to introduce, implement and support this change. In "The Energized Approach" Michael introduces the 10 energy sources that are critical for success and offers time-tested strategies to minimize resistance maximize participation and create the energy that is essential for success.

SpencerSpeaks—Motivation.Safety.Inspiration

Spencer Beach was a third-generation flooring installer and among the best in his field when he endured a horrific flash fire that left him permanently and severely scarred. He will share his personal story that offers messages which will no doubt have an impact on you personally and professionally.



See our online Events calendar for the great lineup of speakers, presentations and topics that will be covered during this year's T&O! Plus learn about new products and services and speak with supplier representatives during the Vendor Showcase and Trade Show.

Save the dates!

• Transformer School Pre-Conference

Dec. 14-15, MMUA Training Center, Marshall

• Transformer School

Dec. 15-17, MMUA Training Center, Marshall

• Electrical Distribution Design Workshop

Jan. 11-13 at MMUA, Plymouth

• Emergency Preparedness and Restoration Conference

Jan. 25-26, Holiday Inn, St. Cloud