

Varied duties mean never a dull day in the office for Bagley's Bill Masterson

Bill Masterson must be the busiest guy in Bagley.

Masterson is the general manager of Bagley Public Utilities. The utility provides electricity, natural gas, water, sewer, refuse collection, cable TV and internet service. He is also the street superintendent and, with a background in construction, he has assumed the duties of zoning commissioner.

That's a lot, even in an industry known for people wearing many hats.

"The only thing we don't have is phone," said Masterson, taking a brief break from his duties.

Masterson isn't the only one wearing many hats.

The utility employs four field staff. Each employee has an area of expertise, but most hold multiple licenses and qualifications and are skilled at helping each other out on the various utilities. One summer helper is also employed. Inside, Office Manager Vicky Fletcher has been with the utility for nearly 32 years, and oversees one full-time and one part-time office staff.

The city buys its power at wholesale from the Northern Municipal Power Agency.

Masterson has been with



Municipal utility managers are often known to 'wear many hats,' but Bagley's Bill Masterson outpaces most in the number of services he supervises.

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the city for 10 years. He started as the street superintendent, and moved into the utility general manager's job when it opened up a couple years ago.

City crews have been very busy. State Hwy. 92, which also doubles as Main Avenue, was resurfaced through the city last year. The city took the opportunity to upgrade or replace utilities. Most of the work on the \$2.85 million project is complete, but work will resume in 2019 to complete a pedestrian trail from downtown to the high school, concrete sidewalk, curb and gutter, and concrete boulevard, as well as final paving.

The city is also looking at a busy upcoming construction season. Dollar General is coming to the city, and wants to start building in March. Team Industries, with approximately 300 employees, is expanding its 110,000 square foot headquarters/drivetrain manufacturing plant in the industrial park. The city is also planning for a four-inch gas main system expansion, which will provide a loop feed to its largest industrial customer.

Masterson is originally from Bemidji. Like a surprising number of municipal utility people in Greater Minnesota, he also farms 30 miles north of Bagley. He is a former Navy Seabee with a construction background and came to the city from a national general contractor/construction company.

The dead of winter hasn't provided any rest for the city crew. The end of January (and early March) brought record-breaking cold. Those months

sandwiched February, which broke the snowfall record.

The elementary school roof buckled Feb. 25, under the weight of snow. You might not think that would involve the city, but the next day, to reduce weight in the roof, the building manager decided to empty the fire suppression system. Water wouldn't run down an inside drain, however—it would spill outside and drain into a storm-sewer drain on Hwy. 92. With temperatures below zero, city crews had to scramble to make sure the drain was open.

All which goes with the territory at a municipal utility serving approximately 800

electric and 525 gas customers. Despite competition, the city is gaining internet customers, and the cable TV system is holding steady.

Approaching Bagley on Hwy. 92 from the south, you wind through beautiful country around Itasca State Park. Cross the Clearwater River and city hall soon appears, on the east side of the highway and just south of U.S. Hwy. 2.

Bagley Public Utilities was founded in 1907. It has more than 750 electric and approximately 525 gas customers. The Clearwater County seat, Bagley has enjoyed modest population recently, growing to 1,392 in the 2010 census.

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