

SMMPA plans dramatic carbon reduction program

Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (SMMPA) Feb. 5 announced its plan to reshape its generation portfolio through the retirement of the Sherco 3 coal-fired power plant and replace it primarily with wind and solar generation. The plan would result in a 90 percent reduction in carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions from 2005 levels and 80 percent carbon-free energy on an annual basis in 2030.

“We have a unique opportunity to reimagine SMMPA and are excited to take the Agency in this new direction,” said Dave Geschwind, Executive Director and CEO. “We will be taking our commitment to sustainability to a new level while maintaining our legacy of reliability and affordability.”

SMMPA currently owns 41 percent of the 900-megawatt Sherco 3 coal-fired generating unit located in Becker. Sherco 3’s majority owner, Xcel Energy, announced plans in 2019 to retire the plant in 2030. SMMPA

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MMUA holds Meter School

There was a strong turnout for the annual MMUA Meter School and its Pre-Conference, both held at the MMUA Training Center in Marshall. The program stretched from Feb. 11-14. For more on this top-notch training, see page 12.

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Roaring back

Once reeling from floods, City of Warren advances on numerous fronts

What a difference a few years can make.

Ravaged by repeated floods, the City of Warren lost about 20 percent of its population between 1980 and 2000. An extensive flood diversion channel is now in place, and the Marshall County seat of approximately 1,600 is advancing on a variety of fronts.

A new recreational/community center, featuring an ice rink, just opened. About half of the \$1.1 million cost was paid through donations from foundations, businesses and individuals. A new hospital—the North Valley Health Center—opened five years ago.



Shannon Mortenson, Warren's city administrator-clerk/treasurer, has played a leading role in Climate Smart Municipalities.

The downtown business district is bustling, but there's a new problem—No retail storefronts are available.

Warren has also become an internationally-known leader in 'smart' energy use.

Once a year, City Administration Shannon Mortenson and Electric Operations Manager Brent McMillan travel to Warren's sister city of Arnberg, Germany, and once a year the Germans visit Warren.

The exchange happens through the Climate Smart Municipalities program, coordinated by the University of Minnesota and funded through

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Marshall's Roos made a lifetime study of how Public Power works

Brad Roos, general manager of Marshall Municipal Utilities (MMU), plans to retire this summer after 17 years in Marshall and 47 years with Public Power. His long tenure is one thing, but that only begins to tell the story—the Roos pedigree of municipal electric utility leadership extends for three generations and collectively almost 100 years.

Consider this perspective: Roos is secretary-treasurer of Missouri River Energy Services (MRES), which is MMU's wholesale power supplier. Allen Roos, Brad's father, helped create the organization that would become MRES—the Missouri Basin Municipal Power Agency.

Allen Roos left his private electrical contracting business to become Orange City, Iowa's utilities manager in 1959. Toward

the end of his career he also became city manager. He served in both positions, until retiring in 1986. He was also president of the Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities.

Brad Roos started his career as a laborer at the Orange City utility. He earned a business degree. He spent seven years as Sanborn, Iowa City Administrator, where he also managed the gas and water utilities. Later, he served 19 years as Denison, Iowa utility manager. He then continued his trek up U.S. Hwy. 59, moving due north to take the reins at MMU, 17 years ago.

Throughout it all, he was a student of municipal utilities—or, as he put it, “what works and what doesn't work.”

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Brad Roos in his office, which includes pictures of his father and grandfather.

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the German government. The exchange started by pairing five Minnesota cities and five German cities. (Perhaps not surprisingly, four of the Minnesota cities are MMUA members: Warren, Elk River, Duluth and Rochester. They were joined by Morris, and White Bear Lake was added in 2019.)

While Warren has adopted or developed some notable programs and practices, that isn't really what the program has been about.

What has filtered through is "how we approach things," Mortenson said. The German "thought processes" are a little different, she said.

Going back to using reusable plates and cups at city hall has resulted in savings of over \$1,200 a year. City and businesses are aggressively installing LED lights. There is a mandatory curbside recycling program that the city is paying for through reduced landfill fees.

One development has garnered national attention and led to a day-long presentation

at the State Fair—thermal imaging with drones.

The program started with casual conversation as former state Sen. Leroy Stumpf flew with the German delegation into Thief River Falls' Regional Airport. While taking an impromptu tour of the Northland Community & Technical College aviation program, the Germans mentioned that they had done a flyover of Arnsberg to conduct rooftop thermal imaging.

"What if we did that with our drones?" someone from the College's aviation program wondered aloud. That thought turned into a successful grant application. Students last winter completed the early-morning imaging work. The colorful images highlight where houses are leaking heat—important information for the homeowner and Warren's cold-climate electric/natural gas utility.

Going through the data, determining what needs to be done, and working with residents is ongoing. The city is considering a financing program to allow people to make the needed upgrades revealed by the thermal images.

The attention is nice, but



Warren City Hall (to the right) and the Marshall County courthouse building, as they appeared earlier this winter. Local crews were clearing snow on Minnesota Hwy. 1 the day this picture was taken.

it doesn't mean a thing if the city isn't doing the job for its citizens.

"We want to make sure our residents are happy," Mortenson said.

In an indication of the strong relationships that have developed since its inception in 2016, the German government has extended funding of the three-year program for two more years.

"It's been a life-changing experience," said Mortenson. "I'm extremely grateful."

Warren is also a Minnesota GreenStep City. It has obtained the services of an eight-week intern, who has

begun developing an automated benchmarking program to track utility usage of its buildings, with the potential to expand to private commercial buildings and residential households.

Busy utility crews

The city operates electric, natural gas, water and wastewater utilities. It provides garbage service. There are streets to take care of, and the city also operates an airport, golf course, pool and campground. A new 200,000 gallon water tower has replaced an old 75,000 gallon tower.

Warren recently upgraded

its natural gas 'town border' regulator station and the distribution system was expanded to a rural residential area with 35 customers. The local crew did all the distribution system work.

Warren is unique in having McMillan, an electrical engineer working as a journeyman lineworker/electric operations manager. He is joined by journeyman lineworker Tyler Jevne, and a five-person utilities/public works crew, overseen by Public Works Supervisor Jeff Wohlers.

Wohlers has been with the city 20 years and the public works crew is busy.

"We work," he said. "There's a lot of do and stay on top of."

That task is helped by computerization of the various systems.

With expertise in a number of areas, city staff also occasionally lend a hand to other cities and municipal utilities in the area.

Floodway major improvement
Platted in 1879, the city was named for Charles Warren, a railroad official.

The Snake River, which provided water for steam locomotives, winds through the city. Flooding was a problem throughout the city's history but appears to have been alleviated with a recent flood control project.

The Richard P. Nelson Floodway (named for a late Mayor of Warren), starts along the Snake on the city's northeast side, skirts the city and reconnects to the river to the southwest. The four-mile channel directs excess water around the town and back to the river. The floodway reaches about 16 feet deep, and averages 160 feet wide at the top of its edges.

A 550-acre impoundment can hold the water from a 100-year flood event, and slowly release into the river as the flood subsides.

Developing the floodway was a long process, but the project was functional in 2006 when it saved the city from another flood.



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