

Minnkota

MAY-JUNE 2020 / MINNKOTA.COM

MESSENGER



Powering through the pandemic

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When faced with a global pandemic, reliable electricity is more important than ever. Minnkota has taken unprecedented actions to protect the health of its employees, while continuing to keep the lights on for homes, hospitals and other essential businesses.

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A global health crisis can't stop rural electric cooperatives from exceptional service. Minnkota's member-owners made their values clear when they ditched standard operations to go digital, educate their members and give back to their communities.

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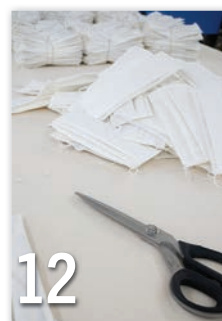
When the communities that support them needed support themselves, several of the area's cornerstone businesses rose to the occasion. We highlight four Minnesota companies that shifted gears to gear up health care providers, essential workers and homebound students.

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The Thronson family of Mahanomen, Minn., is the epitome of the expression, "Like father, like son." As the patriarch of the family retires from one electric cooperative, his three boys continue the tradition at co-ops across Minnkota's service territory.



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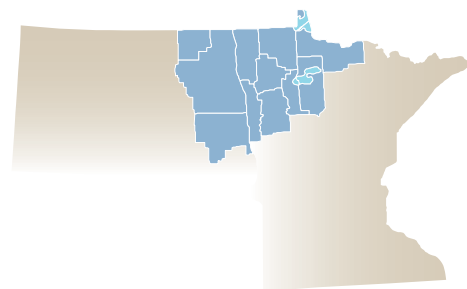


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On the cover: Bertha Morrison meticulously sews a valance at Anderson Fabrics in Blackduck, Minn., wearing one of the thousands of protective face masks that she and her coworkers have produced over the past few months. The company is one of several in the region that have adjusted operations to assist in the worldwide battle against COVID-19.

Photo / Anderson Fabrics



Minnkota Power Cooperative is a generation and transmission cooperative headquartered in Grand Forks, N.D. It supplies wholesale electricity to 11 member-owner distribution cooperatives, three in eastern North Dakota and eight in northwestern Minnesota. Minnkota also serves as operating agent for the Northern Municipal Power Agency, an association of 12 municipal utilities in the same service region. Together, the Joint System serves more than 153,000 customers.

Minnkota Messenger is published six times a year by Minnkota Power Cooperative. Its mission is to communicate Minnkota's perspectives and concerns to its members, elected officials, employees and other business audiences. For editorial inquiries, call (701) 795-4282 or email bfladhammer@minnkota.com.

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Progress continues amid pandemic

In an open field outside of Center, N.D., a sky-blue drilling rig stands as a beacon of optimism for the future of Project Tundra.

Minnkota is leading Project Tundra, which aims to build the world's largest CO₂ capture facility at the Milton R. Young Station. The project would remove more than 90% of the CO₂ from the plant's Unit 2 generator and safely and permanently store it more than a mile underground.

Instead of searching for oil, the rig is drilling a 10,000-foot-deep test well to give Minnkota a clear picture of the CO₂ storage zones. The project began in mid-May and will continue through the end of June. From the well, researchers will retrieve rock cores and geologic data to ensure the safety and environmental stewardship of the CO₂ storage facility. No CO₂ will be injected during the test well process.

The Energy and Environmental Research Center (EERC) at the University of North Dakota is focused on Project Tundra's CO₂ storage facility with support from a \$17 million Department of Energy (DOE) Phase III CarbonSAFE grant received in April.

"We've been really fortunate to be part of Minnkota's team and help them work on Project Tundra for a number of years," said EERC CEO Charlie Gorecki. "We've been awarded the Phase III effort, which looks at storage options for Minnkota, should they choose to go forward with capturing CO₂ from the Milton R. Young power plant near Center, N.D. If that happens, we would con-

tinue to have reliable power from North Dakota lignite coal that has very low carbon emissions."

The test well work will build on two decades of research the EERC has conducted on CO₂ storage in North Dakota, including a 3D seismic survey near the Young Station during fall 2019. Research has continually shown the state's geology is ideal for CO₂ storage.

"Taking the next step in this research shows that North Dakota is well-positioned to bring a carbon capture and storage facility, like Project Tundra, into commercial operation," said Mac McLennan, Minnkota president & CEO. "We are pleased to continue work with the energy experts at EERC because of their in-depth understanding of our industry and North Dakota's unique geology."

Minnkota has also begun a partnership with Fluor Corporation to conduct the Front-End Engineering and Design (FEED) study work on the CO₂ capture facility. Funded through federal grants, the study will provide an advanced engineering plan for building the capture technologies at the Young Station, as well as detailed economics related to construction and operation.

If a decision is made to move forward with Project Tundra, construction could begin near the end of 2022. It would represent an important step forward for carbon capture technology.

"The innovative technologies being evaluated have the potential to serve as a blueprint for the rest of the world to significantly reduce CO₂ emissions without sacrificing grid reliability and affordability," McLennan said.



A new normal

MINNKOTA EMPLOYEES POWER ON
AS PANDEMIC SWEEPS THE GLOBE

Matt Foster, engineer II, is the only employee in a long row of workstations at Minnkota's Grand Forks headquarters. Many employees are working from home as a precaution against the spread of COVID-19.

After a 12-hour shift keeping a watchful eye on the region's electric grid, Troy Tretter goes home and starts his new routine. In his garage, he applies a healthy dose of hand sanitizer. Once inside, Tretter's clothes go directly into the laundry and he heads straight to the shower. Finally, he's able to greet his wife, 2-year-old son and newborn boy who was brought into the world in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

It's a world that has changed significantly – and, in some ways, permanently – during the last two months due to the spread of the virus. Businesses have closed or significantly altered operation. School is being conducted almost exclusively online. Many social gatherings have been canceled or postponed.

"It's definitely made us all be more cautious," said Tretter, a power system operator. "We've been doing grocery pickups and

things like that rather than going into the stores. It makes you think twice before going out in public."

Still, the power must stay on. As an electricity provider, Minnkota is classified as an essential business that can never truly close. Unprecedented actions have been taken to protect the safety and health of the cooperative's 400 employees. Since mid-March, most of the office staff have been working from home, while outside crews and power plant personnel have been split into smaller, separate crews to accommodate increased social distancing and sanitization.

Tretter is a member of the team that monitors the reliability of the electric grid 24 hours a day. Each power system operator sits alone in a room surrounded by digital monitors displaying colored lines and blinking lights – each of which represents a connection to reliable electricity for homes, essential businesses and hospitals during



the pandemic. It's a job that requires months of training, ongoing education and federal certifications.

"It's in the back of your head that there are only a handful of people who can do your job," Tretter said. "We want to be as safe as we possibly can be."

While the group is already in a highly secure area separated from the rest of the workforce, additional social distancing and disinfection precautions have been taken to help protect the group from spreading the virus. The power system operators are never together in the same room – a protocol that requires detailed communication.

"We have to really be sharp in our documentation of everything we've done during the day and pass that information on to our replacement," said fellow power system operator Aaron Bjerke. "There's no room for error. You have to be focused and diligent and make sure that you have all the information in front of you. One misstep and people are without power."

Building a team

Storms, cyberattacks, system malfunctions – Minnkota has emergency plans in



David Whalen, facilities and services coordinator, prepares packages of cloth masks, which were sent to all 400 Minnkota employees.

place for these and many other industry crises. A pandemic presents a different challenge. In early March, the cooperative formed a pandemic preparedness team representing all employee divisions. The team meets throughout each week via conference call to assess the ever-changing situation, implement procedures and keep the lines of communication open with the entire workforce.

Some of the first steps taken were to significantly upgrade cleaning services, provide higher-grade disinfectants and develop cleaning protocols in the event the virus is contracted by an employee.

"We've tried to flood the workplace with all the available cleaning tools that we might need," said Jason Uhler, corporate services manager and pandemic team member. "The amount of cleaning that's being done is very visible."

All common workspaces and frequently touched items, like door handles, are being routinely sanitized using hospital-grade disinfectants. Cleaning stations have been strategically set up for employees to further address personal workspaces – whether it be an office desk or a work truck. Minnkota



Minnkota's contracted cleaning crews have upgraded their services to include stronger-grade disinfectants and routine sanitization of commonly touched surfaces, such as door handles.

has even purchased a disinfectant fogging system to provide an additional level of sanitization.

"It's meant to be used as a complement to traditional cleaning and disinfection," Uhler said of the fogger. "We have hard-to-reach areas that aren't easy to wipe down, like shared forklifts, tools and large pieces of equipment."



Brandon Greene, apprentice electrician, applies hand sanitizer at one of the cleaning stations set up in Minnkota's Grand Forks fleet garage.

Minnkota's procurement department has worked to ensure the cooperative has access to all materials during the pandemic – from hand sanitizer bottles to steel for substation construction.

Safety among the distractions

Power plant personnel and power delivery crews have continued to report to work, albeit in smaller, separate crews to limit the amount of employees on site and to allow for greater social distancing.

In addition to health concerns, COVID-19 has created an undeniable amount of distractions. Safety communication has been prominent to ensure employees are working

to protect themselves and their co-workers from on-the-job hazards.

"Everyone from our leadership team all the way through the rest of our workforce has kept safety at the forefront," Uhler said. "It's important to have those continual reminders during these times of different work schedules."

At the Young Station, maintenance crews are typically scheduled for day shift, with only two mechanics on an evening shift. Now, there is a fairly equal day and night shift. Face-to-face overlap that had previously been typical for communication purposes has been discontinued, and that communication is taking place in other ways.

"We used to have crossover time between shifts; now we don't even want them to see each other," said Ross Ford, plant maintenance superintendent. "That extra time allows us to clean work areas, community tools, keyboards – everything."

The days of filling conference rooms for morning briefings have been replaced by phone calls and video chats. As challenges arise on projects, emails are becoming the new standard.

"You used to walk down to the work area and show the person what you needed," Ford said. "Now that has to be communicated through an email."

Additional safeguards have been put in place at the Young Station to isolate employees from business-critical contractors. The contractors and employees now have separate entrances, bathrooms and break areas. If work needs to be conducted that makes social distancing a challenge, proper personal protective equipment (PPE) is required.

From your living room

For now, the hallways of Minnkota are mostly quiet. Many employees haven't been in the same room together for months. Bedrooms, living rooms and basements have been turned into temporary offices.

In short order, Minnkota's Information Technology department distributed ad-



Brandon Allen, field safety specialist, demonstrates how Minnkota's disinfectant fogger works to sanitize areas.



Many meetings, including Minnkota's board meeting, are being conducted online through video conference.

ditional mobile technologies and enhanced remote working capabilities, all while still protecting the cooperative from cybersecurity threats. Video conferences have become the common way for employees to collaborate. Even Minnkota's board meeting was conducted online with each director occupying a small square on the digital screen.

Despite distractions and obstacles, Minnkota's employees have continued to make progress on important projects and have kept the power flowing safely and reliably into local communities. The camaraderie is still there, too.

"We text and Snapchat together quite a bit," Tretter said of the power system operator team. "We're a pretty tight group."

The pandemic team is evaluating ways to gradually transition employees back to normal operations, but it will be a new normal. Things will be different, but if the past few months are any indication, Minnkota's employees will respond.

"There's always the common thread that the North Dakota community does a great job of pulling together and rising to whatever challenges we face," Uhler said. "This particular situation forces us to be separated, but we are still seeing that same spirit of community."

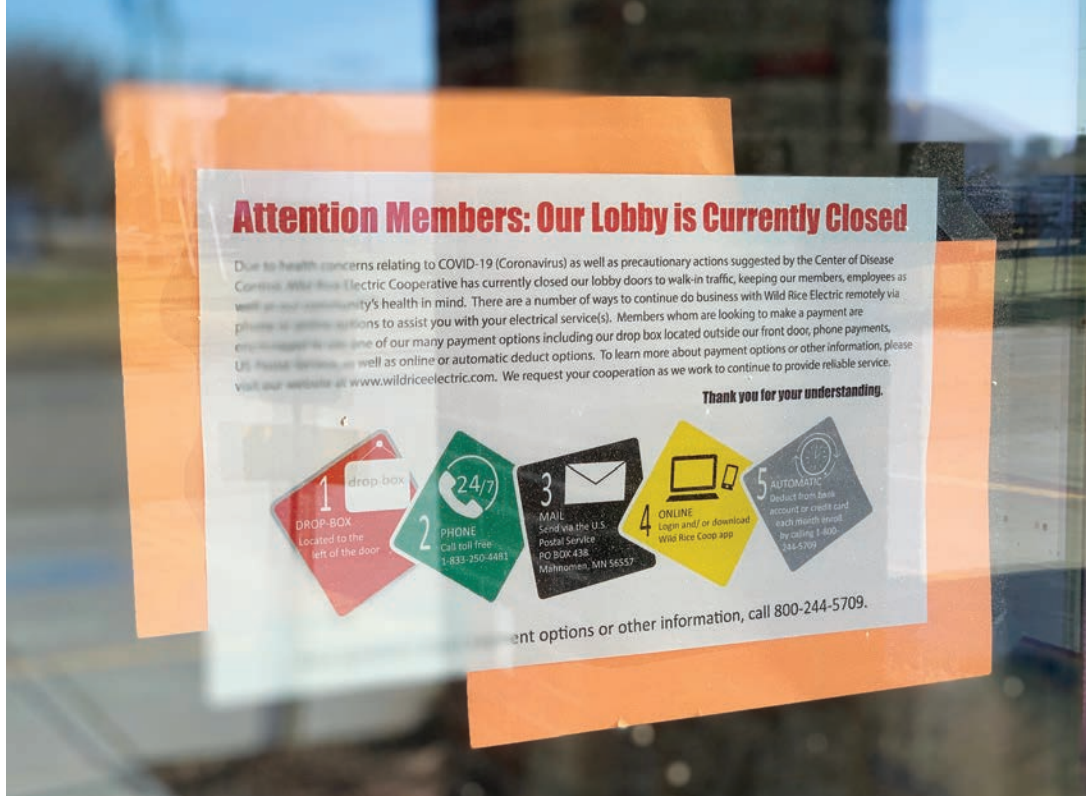
By Ben Fladhammer / Photography Michael Hoefft

Minnkota response to COVID-19

In mid-March, Minnkota implemented a series of stringent and detailed protocols to manage issues surrounding COVID-19. This multifold response plan included:

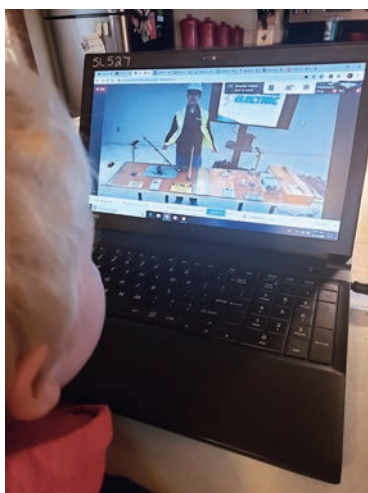
- Employees were requested to perform self-monitoring and to not report to work if they were sick.
- Employees who were able to work from home were asked to do so to minimize exposure.
- Facility access to Minnkota's Grand Forks campus and the Milton R. Young Station was limited to business-essential personnel only.
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfection procedures were implemented, including the use of hospital-grade cleaning products and the installation of employee sanitization stations.
- Power delivery crews, who primarily work outside, were separated into different project areas to allow for greater social distancing.
- Power plant personnel were split into smaller, non-overlapping shifts to limit the number of people on-site at the Milton R. Young Station and to allow for greater social distancing. Lunch breaks and break times were staggered to minimize exposure.
- Employees were required to self-quarantine if they exhibited symptoms of COVID-19, traveled to potential high-risk areas or had close contact with someone who tested positive for the virus.
- All employees were given cloth masks to wear at work and in public.

A lobby closure sign hangs in the window of Wild Rice Electric Cooperative, as cooperatives around the region joined the fight to slow the spread of the coronavirus.



Co-op values conquer COVID-19

MINNKOTA MEMBER COOPERATIVES
USE RESOURCES AND INGENUITY TO SAFELY AND EFFECTIVELY
SERVE THEIR COMMUNITIES



A little boy is glued to the computer screen as Wild Rice's Tommy Houdek delivers his annual electricity safety presentation to local homebound students through an online platform.

With COVID-19 case counts growing and CDC guidelines tightening, March 20 was a difficult day for Wild Rice Electric Cooperative's Tommy Houdek. The director of member services and communications remembers the flyer taped to the front door of the Mahanomen, Minn., office: "Our Lobby is Currently Closed."

"I'll be honest, that part was tough," Houdek recalled. "Just having to go put that sign up – it was a hard pill to swallow. I thought, wow, is this really happening?"

Face-to-face service is how the region's rural electric cooperatives have fortified their strong member connections since the start of the cooperative

model more than 80 years ago. When the coronavirus pandemic struck and physical distancing became the new normal, Minnkota's member cooperatives didn't slow down. They jump-started solutions, reimaged their processes and stepped up to serve their communities.

"We are keeping business going remotely and keeping options open for our members in a number of different ways," Houdek said. "Many people have been affected by this, so we want to try and be there for them and help them in any way we're able."

Pandemic pivots

COVID-19 fears arose during a season of celebration for many coop-



COVID-19 guidelines forced many co-op employees to leave the office and set up an at-home work station. Wild Rice's Tommy Houdek utilized garage space for his home workspace.

"We are keeping business going remotely and keeping options open for our members in a number of different ways. Many people have been affected by this, so we want to try and be there for them and help them in any way we're able."

– Tommy Houdek, director of member services and communications,
Wild Rice Electric Cooperative

eratives, with annual meetings, spring service projects and summer tours just over the horizon.

"Postponement of our annual meeting was the first hard decision to make," said Kelli Brateng, Red Lake Electric Cooperative member services manager. "After that, the management staff decided to completely close the doors and have many employees work at home."

Several other cooperatives indefinitely postponed their annual meetings, closed their lobbies and sent most office staff home to carry out duties from their spare bedrooms, kitchen tables and even garages.

"We have definitely become more flexible in terms of what can be done remotely, especially from the office and administrative perspective," said Robyn Sonstegard, finance manager for North Star Electric Cooperative. "Things we would have not thought of or tried to do remotely are now being done that way. It should give us a different perspective going forward, after COVID-19."

Cooperative changes focused on going digital. This included collaborating differently with co-workers using phone conferencing and video meetings, but extended to communicating with

consumers. Members were encouraged in newsletters, on co-op websites and through social media to utilize online payment options for their electric bill.

"Some people are also noticing tools that they didn't know that we had, or were uncertain of the benefits, such as our Wild Rice Co-op app, where you can monitor your usage, pay your bills and things like that," Houdek explained. "It's definitely a win-win for us and the member in that regard."

Social media also proved to be helpful during the crisis. Co-ops with a strong Facebook follower base communicated closings and postponements in the early stages. From there, the power of the platform expanded.

"With the stay-at-home order, this has been a great tool to engage with members and our community about safety and energy efficiency information and tips, along with updates to our COVID-19 response plan," said Angela Lyseng, Beltrami Electric Cooperative marketing and communications specialist.

Not every member has the ability – or desire – to connect with their co-op online, so some offices found

Co-ops reach out through social media



Minnkota's member cooperatives used social media to share COVID-19 information, resources and stories during the height of the crisis.



Clearwater-Polk Electric Cooperative installed additional drop box signage for members who were used to paying their bills in the office.

even more solutions to serve everyone while physically distancing.

"We are putting in an intercom system that is going to be mounted on the outside of our main door entrance," explained Clearwater-Polk Electric Cooperative's Deanna Lefebvre. "We have also communicated the different ways members can pay their bill and have put up a large sign to identify where our drop box is."

Linework must go on

The functionality of an electric cooperative comes down to the ability of the field crews to do their job. Staying 6 feet from fellow lineworkers makes maintaining and repairing power systems more difficult, but every co-op found its own way to keep power flowing reliably while maintaining social distance.



When an ice storm hit Red Lake Electric's territory during the pandemic, crews didn't slow down – they simply maintained social distancing guidelines.



PKM Electric line foreman Scott Slusar was one of many cooperative innovators who used Zoom to remotely teach classrooms about electrical safety.

As with many providers, PKM Electric Cooperative line crews worked on shift rotation, with half of the crew alternating every other day. They eventually moved to full shifts with staggered start and stop times. "During the rotation schedule, each lineworker had their own vehicle. When the shift ended each day, the truck was thoroughly cleaned, providing a safe environment for the next occupant," said PKM's Chelsy Davey.

"This is one of those times where it is a plus that we are a small co-op," added Clearwater-Polk's Lefebvre. "We have only eight linemen and with that many, we have enough co-op vehicles so each of them can drive separately."

Other co-ops noted that their teams would focus on projects that could be completed while distancing, such as certain Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) updates and line inspections. However, outage restoration remained priority No. 1, especially in light of a spring ice and wind system that swept through the region in early April.

Concern for community

Minnkota's member co-ops discovered ways to go above and beyond standard member service in the face of crisis. Cass County Electric Cooperative donated a collective total of more than 1,000 N-95 face masks to Essentia Health and Sanford Health. When its members offered more suggestions, the cooperative delivered more masks to the Fargo VA Health Care System, CHI Mercy Health of Valley City and the Fargo Police Department.

"We are a community-focused organization focused on delivering affordable, reliable and safe energy to our consumer-members. But for us, it's more than that," said Cass County president and CEO Marshal Albright. "We are a part of this community, so if we have resources that can help in this time of need, we are glad to help."

Other co-ops helped in other ways,



Left: Cass County Electric Cooperative president and CEO Marshal Albright drops off hundreds of N-95 masks for Essentia Health. Bottom left: A Fargo VA Health Care System representative displays mask donations from CCEC. Right: The Fargo Police Department accepts a mask donation from CCEC.



"We are a community-focused organization focused on delivering affordable, reliable and safe energy to our consumer-members. But for us, it's more than that. We are a part of this community, so if we have resources that can help in this time of need, we are glad to help."

– Marshal Albright, president and CEO,
Cass County Electric Cooperative

sharing resources for the Energy Assistance Program with those who struggled to pay bills, or helping small businesses navigate the state and federal resources available to keep them afloat during trying times.

Co-op assistance even spread to students who had transitioned to home learning. Distance wouldn't stop PKM and Wild Rice from their annual classroom electric safety presentations – they simply delivered them via video conferencing.

Electric cooperatives across the country have had to overcome a great deal throughout the COVID-19 challenge. But they've learned, they've adjusted, they've gone the extra mile and they've prepared for the future.

Nodak Electric Cooperative's Blaine Rekken, energy/member services manager, says

the past weeks have been a great test for business continuity. "This is giving us good experience for updating our recovery plans in response to pandemics," he said. "Our plans and routine tabletop exercises are just best guesses until we run through an actual real-life event such as this."

Rekken, Houdek and countless other member service leaders in Minnesota and North Dakota realize that sometimes it takes unprecedented times to reveal unprecedented resilience.

"For a while there, things were changing by the minute," Houdek recalled. "But our employees have done a fantastic job serving our members while adapting to this change."

By Kaylee Cusack / Submitted photos



The business of caring

Co-op member companies alter operations and give generously to fulfill the region's pandemic needs

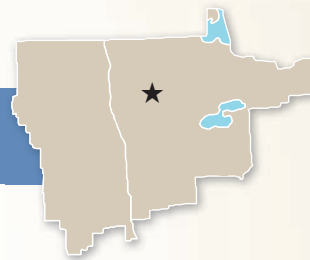
Many families, businesses and schools in Minnkota's service territory faced incredible struggle in the wake of stay-at-home orders and general COVID-19 uncertainty. Through the challenges, several companies dug deep to help meet the extra needs of those who were affected the most – health care systems, vulnerable populations, essential workers and students. It sometimes took a shift in operations and a shift in mindset. Minnkota is grateful for the generosity and inventiveness of the following municipal and member-cooperative businesses and all the others who have given their all as so much is taken from their communities.



Left: Collaborative design efforts for ventilators like this one began in mid-March between Digi-Key and the University of Minnesota. (Aaron Tucker, University of Minnesota) *Below:* To keep employees safe, Digi-Key engineers designed an ultraviolet sanitization tunnel used to disinfect warehouse totes. (Digi-Key)



THIEF RIVER FALLS MUNICIPAL UTILITIES



Early on in the coronavirus outbreak, the leaders at Digi-Key in Thief River Falls recognized there was a rapidly growing need for the parts used in lifesaving applications. The electronics component distribution company went into response mode. It began to protect inventory for health care, safety and other critical functions and shifted its engineering resources to focus on those areas.

Among Digi-Key's reprioritized projects was a partnership with the University of Minnesota to develop and supply additional ventilators for COVID-19 patients during the global shortage. The university has made the collaborative project – the Coventor ventilator – open source. That means other manufacturers can create their own ventilator versions using the Coventor schematics.

"The partnership with the University of Minnesota has been amazing and we're honored to partner with them," said Shane Zutz, vice president of human resources at Digi-Key. "It truly was a talented group of individuals pulling together to make a device that can help so many people in such a short amount of time."

In addition, Digi-Key promptly supplied components to customers who were manufacturing parts for ventilators and other devices critical to the coronavirus fight, such as thermometers, motion-activated hand sanitizing stations and the equipment needed for employees to work remotely.

"We've received dozens of emails and letters from these customers thanking the Digi-Key team for sending the vital components they need in record time," Zutz said.

Another Digi-Key innovation that rose from the crisis was a new ultraviolet (UV) sanitation tunnel used to disinfect the nearly 8,000 totes that move product around the company's Thief River Falls warehouse. The invention goes beyond keeping Digi-Key employees safe – the design will be shared with other global components distributors.

"Digi-Key is the embodiment of the spirit and values of our community and entire region," Zutz said. "We don't retreat when faced with challenges, but rise to the occasion and bring everyone together to be part of the solution."



Far North Spirits owner Michael Swanson fills a jug of hand sanitizer to be packed up with the next round of deliveries. (Far North Spirits)

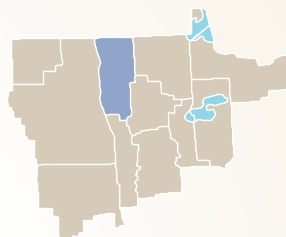
FAR NORTH SPIRITS

SKANE TOWNSHIP

EST. 2013

MN

PKM ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



Typically known as a northern Minnesota distiller of quality whiskey, vodka and gin, Hallock's Far North Spirits realized its production model put the business in perfect position to make a difference during the COVID-19 crisis.

"Before this pandemic started, whenever we would give tours, we would talk about how high-proof alcohol is a hand sanitizer. It kills everything," said Far North Spirits owner Cheri Reese.

Once Minnesota started closing bars and restaurants to the public, Reese began connecting with her distillery colleagues throughout the state. They developed a plan to convert operations to produce hand sanitizer for hospitals, grocery stores and other essential services.

"We learned early on that the only way to get high-proof denatured ethyl alcohol was to get it by the tanker truck-full, because the demand was so high. So we partnered with a group of Twin Cities distilleries so that we could buy a tote at a time of this denatured alcohol from them, and then get the glycerin and the hydrogen peroxide to start making it," Reese explained.

In the first two weeks of April, Far North had already produced 650 gallons of hand sanitizer. The product distributed to Kittson County's essential services was

entirely donated, meeting the needs of EMT services, hospitals, grocery stores, social services and the courthouse. Outside of Kittson County, the distillery received orders from the Border Patrol, the City of Thief River Falls, the Pembina County Courthouse and more. Reese said orders have gone out as far as Detroit Lakes, Bemidji and the middle of North Dakota.



"North of Alexandria and west of Bemidji, there are no distilleries. So we're filling that need for that half of the state of Minnesota," she said. "Everybody is so appreciative. Everyone who calls says, 'We can't find this – can you help us?' We're thrilled that we can do this quickly."

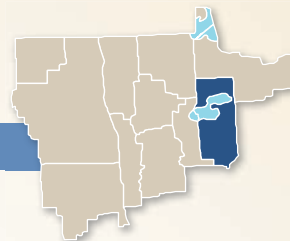
Far North collaborated with C&M Ford for assistance with delivering hand sanitizer to more remote towns like Karlstad, Warren and Roseau. Reese said the partnership was incredibly helpful in minimizing person-to-person contact.

The distillery is still producing spirits and filling orders for alcohol, but hand sanitizer has become a major part of the staff's day-to-day.

"We've always been very much invested in this community," Reese said. "Being able to do something that was really meaningful and helpful at this time – there was just no question. It's just what you do."



BELTRAMI ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



For 40 years, Anderson Fabrics of Blackduck, Minn., has been known for its high-quality, up-scale designs for window treatments, bedding and other home accessories. But when COVID-19 entered the national conversation, the company began researching how it could shift gears and stitch up some personal protective equipment (PPE) shortfalls.

“When we first started, we actually started asking out in the community – the hospitals, the clinics, anybody out there – what products we should be trying to make and what should we be focusing on,” said Jennifer Morrison, sales and marketing director for Anderson Fabrics.

Health care providers sent Anderson Fabrics samples of fabric masks, isolation gowns, scrubs, booties and caps, and the team went to work reverse engineering the products to see what could

be made most efficiently and cost-effectively at their plant. They determined fabric masks would be the best way to both help the health care system and keep their employees actively working as typical custom orders slowed.

Anderson Fabrics now manufactures three types of fabric masks, all of which are filling the PPE need for hospitals,

essential industries and individuals around Minnesota and North Dakota – including 1,400 produced for the employees of Minnkota Power Cooperative. Anderson Fabrics has even shipped masks to families as far as Spain.

“We thought we’d make a couple thousand, maybe up to 10,000 by the time it’s all done. But we’ve made at least 70,000 masks so far [over six weeks],” Morrison said. “It hasn’t really slowed



Sandy Kuhlman marks fabric before making the next cut. (Anderson Fabrics)

down. Now we’re happy to keep on doing it and we’ve been doing a good job keeping up with it.”

The company realized that quality face coverings could be expensive or hard to find if families don’t have a seamstress in the household. They wanted to make sure that everyone who needed PPE could get it, so they made their fabric face masks available on the Anderson Fabrics website.

“We’re able to take our skills and our talent and use it for something that can help the broader community.

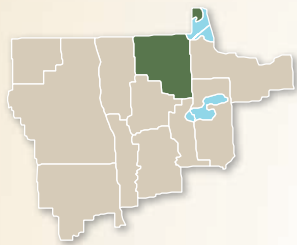
We have a ton of sewers and sewing machines, so we have the capability,” Morrison said. “Our team has done a great job. The whole place has just pitched in. It gives us a purpose in these scary times.”



Cutting manager Erik Weller helps out with sewing masks. (Anderson Fabrics)



Sales and marketing director Jennifer Morrison trims threads to prepare masks for shipping. (Anderson Fabrics)



When schools began to close their doors in Polaris' home communities in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa, the powersports manufacturer knew exactly where they could make an impact. Polaris was founded in Roseau and has been a town cornerstone for decades, and many of the employees' children are in the school system.

"These are unprecedented times with families working to juggle online schooling amidst a myriad of responsibilities as COVID-19 has rearranged all our lives," said Lucy Clark Dougherty, president of the Polaris Foundation. "Polaris is so pleased to donate technology that assists in enabling online learning for families within the communities we operate."

The company donated nearly \$100,000 in technology between the Roseau and Greenbush Middle River School Districts, including 150 iPads, 155 Chromebooks, cases, chargers and mobile hotspots. Polaris made similar donations to schools in Spirit Lake, Iowa, and Osceola, Wisconsin.

Larry Guggisberg, superintendent of Greenbush Middle River School District, said the donation was a "game changer."

"I can't express how grateful our school,

kids and parents are for Polaris' kindness," Guggisberg said. "With the technology grant from Polaris, all students in the Greenbush Middle River School are able to actively participate in quality distance education programming."

Superintendent Thomas A. Jerome echoed the gratitude. "Thank you to Polaris Industries for the incredible donation to the Roseau School District of iPads and covers, as well as hotspots, for families lacking access to broadband. Thanks to Polaris, all – not most – Roseau School District students and families have equal access to distance education," he said.

In addition to the technology donation, Polaris donated nearly 1,300 pairs of sports goggles to support Goggles for Docs, an organization that provides protective eyewear to health care workers fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. The goggles were distributed to facilities across the nation. As of May 1, Goggles for Docs had received more than 40,000 goggle donations from outdoor enthusiasts, businesses and manufacturers. Learn more about the grassroots effort at www.GogglesforDocs.com.

In April, Polaris donated nearly 1,300 pairs of 509 and KLIM goggles to support Goggles For Docs, which provides protective eyewear for health workers. (Polaris)

By Kaylee Cusack





Four men, four cooperatives, one family – the Thronsons are keeping homes powered around the region. Left to right: Chris Thronson, Beltrami Electric Cooperative; Casey Thronson, Red Lake Electric Cooperative; Andrew Thronson, Cass County Electric Cooperative; Dave Thronson, Wild Rice Electric Cooperative; and Rita Thronson.

Cooperative blood

RETIREMENT ISN'T THE END OF THE ELECTRIC LINE
FOR THRONSON FAMILY, AS SONS CARRY ON
COOPERATIVE TRADITION

Thirty years ago, when a vicious storm would roll through Wild Rice Electric Cooperative's service territory, three young Thronson boys wouldn't get scared. They would get quiet.

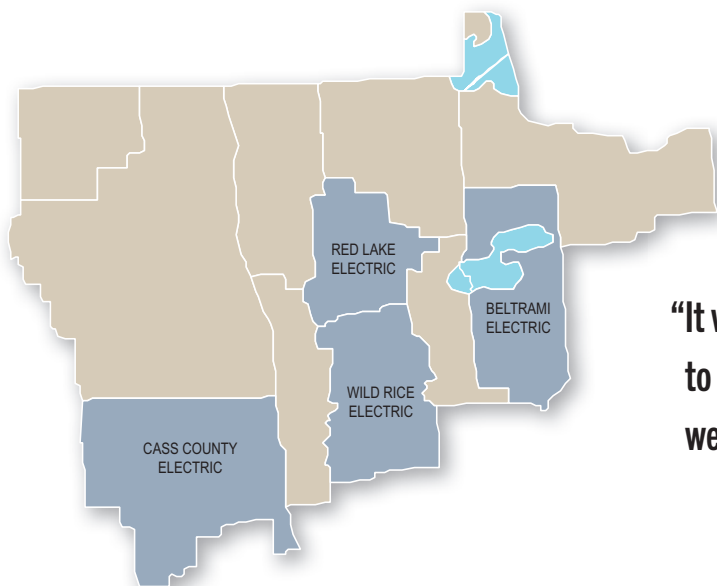
Their dad, Dave, would be out long hours restoring power. He deserved some downtime.

"Whenever I worked all night and came home, they knew they had to be quiet," Thronson remembers. "You know how kids are – they play a lot. So we always told them

to make sure they were quiet so I could rest."

Now, after more than 35 years at Wild Rice Electric, director of operations Dave Thronson will get the rest he deserves when he retires June 26. But the line won't de-energize that day, because those three boys at home grew up and became co-op lineworkers themselves, all within Minnkota Power Cooperative's member systems.

"It was a part of my life," said Andrew Thronson, Cass County Electric journeyman



“It was a part of my life. I knew at a young age I wanted to be a lineworker because of him and seeing what he went through with the calls.”

– Andrew Thronson, Cass County Electric journeyman lineman

lineman. “I knew at a young age I wanted to be a lineworker because of him and seeing what he went through with the calls.”

Andrew, 31, and his twin brothers Casey and Chris, 37, all felt the spark and attended line school. Their careers kept them close to home, with Casey now serving as a crew foreman with Red Lake Electric and Chris as a Beltrami Electric journeyman lineman.

“He never pushed us to go into it,” Casey recalled. “He just always said, ‘It’s a good career. I think you guys would like it.’”

“It was a great job to raise a family,” Chris said. “It showed us hard work and what you get out of that.”

“The satisfaction of getting people’s lights on, of them giving you a thumbs-up when you

drive by during a storm – that feels like a big accomplishment,” Andrew added.

Dave said he never told his sons “one way or the other” that they should enter into the electricity business, but he knew firsthand how alluring cooperatives could be. He has two brothers-in-law who worked for Cass County Electric and Red River Valley Co-op Power. “I think that’s how I got my interest in it, was from those guys,” he said.

When the Thronson men gather for family get-togethers, the conversation seems to slip into a single current. It’s prime time to

discuss what’s happening at different co-ops and swap tricks of the trade.

“Of course, the wives are looking at us like, ‘C’mon guys, we don’t want to talk about work. We want to visit about other things!’” Dave joked.

All the shop talk in the air may also settle into the minds of the Thronson men’s children – five sons and daughters between the three of them. Like their own father, the lineworkers won’t be guiding their kids into the cooperative world. But they certainly won’t be upset if the generations of power distributors continue.

“I will just do what our dad did with us boys – support her, give guidance and answer any questions,” Andrew said of his 19-month-old daughter.

“Family is a huge deal for all of us,” Chris said. “Our dad values being supportive of each other and helpful.”

The Thronson sons now have an opportunity to support their father in his retirement. They won’t be doing that by staying quiet like when they were boys. “I know the grandkids really like spending time with him, so hopefully he gets more time to do that,” Casey said.

“I hope he has a great retirement. He deserves all the happiness for all of his hard work,” Andrew said. “I’ll miss all the linework talk with him,” he added with a laugh.



By Kaylee Cusack / Submitted photos

Minnkota joins cooperative partners to support Gateway to Science

Minnkota Power Cooperative joined with Basin Electric and Great River Energy to support the development of Gateway to Science's new makerspace in Bismarck.

The 7,800-square-foot area, which will be called the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives Innovation Space, will feature movable tables, flexible seating, and a mix of high-tech and low-tech tools and resources. Visitors of all ages can design, prototype and create using 3D printers, laser cutters, sewing machines, electronics and more.

The \$500,000 commitment by North Dakota's electric cooperatives to the Gateway to Science capital campaign will provide an environment that helps build 21st century

skills, such as collaboration, creativity and critical thinking, which are important in the classroom, the workplace and the public sphere.

"We are thrilled to support the creative young minds in our state by helping improve access to first-class educational resources in the areas of science, technology, engineering and math," said Mac McLennan, Minnkota president and CEO. "The makerspace will provide students and community members with the innovative resources that will prepare them for a future that is increasingly driven by technology. We thank GTS for its continued commitment to helping people across our state build bright futures."

"Give Back" drive raises \$5,496

Minnkota employees opened their hearts and wallets to support those struggling from the effects of the pandemic, donating nearly \$5,500 in a first-of-its-kind fundraising effort.

Early in May, Minnkota CEO Mac McLennan proposed a special monthlong "Give Back" drive to bolster the Grand Forks employee Jeans Day Fund amidst the COVID-19 crisis. He announced he would personally match, up to \$2,000, any donations submitted before the start of the next Jeans Day cycle on June 1. Not only did employees meet that \$2,000 mark, they blew past it – in less than two weeks. McLennan's \$2,000 com-



bined with the \$3,496 raised in the "Give Back" drive to be distributed to the response efforts of 10 regional United Way and food shelf organizations.

The Jeans Day program provides an opportunity for employees to pay \$45 a year for the ability to wear jeans on Fridays. The funds raised through Jeans Day are dispersed to area nonprofit and charity organizations suggested by Minnkota employees.

Communications team receives national awards



Minnkota's communications department has received national top honors for its work promoting Project Tundra and electric vehicles.

The team earned two first-place awards from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's (NRECA) Spotlight on Excellence Awards. The program recognizes outstanding work produced by electric co-op communication and marketing professionals across the country. Award winners were celebrated May 27 during a nationwide virtual ceremony.

Minnkota received a Gold award for Most Innovative Use of Digital Communication for its Project Tundra website, which incorporated logo design, video and animation, web design and writing, social media integration and more. The other Gold win was for Best Event, awarded for Minnkota's Plugged In to the Future electric vehicle event held in August.

The Spotlight on Excellence Awards consist of 16 categories that reflect the scope of cooperative communications, including writing, graphic design, marketing campaigns, etc. Entries are judged by industry peers.

For the essential workers who
care for our sick, feed our
families and keep us safe ...
Our team will continue
to create electricity,
maintain the lines and
ensure reliability.

THANK YOU.



We'll power on to help you power on.