

M I N N K O T A

MESSENGER



MARCH - APRIL 2023



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Even with the industry challenges that arose in 2022, Minnkota's annual meeting in March reflected on the many cooperative triumphs of the year – and reaffirmed how the system's strong relationships will help overcome the challenges of the future.



10 A CUT ABOVE THE REST

Bemidji, Minn., is commonly known as the home of Paul Bunyan. However, the community is starting to garner nationwide attention for its metal processing abilities, thanks largely to the work of Bemidji Steel Company (a Beltrami Electric Cooperative member).

Also featured in this issue: **18** From 10-gallon hats to 10,000 lakes /// **20** Minnkota publishes first sustainability report

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It can be difficult to capture the scale and precision of linework projects with a camera. But when Minnkota's team set out to raise a new transmission line structure in March, it was a perfect opportunity to get a unique view of the intricate process.

On the cover: A Minnkota line crew installs the final beams of a 230-kilovolt transmission line structure south of Grand Forks, N.D. Pictured left to right: Joey Hanson, Garret Reineke, Tukker Hammer, and Heath James.

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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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 162,500 consumers.

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Mac McLennan



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Minnkota's members have shown that spare change gathered through the Operation Round Up program can produce major community benefits.

POWERING THE JOURNEY AHEAD

Minnkota holds 83rd annual meeting on the cusp of incredible industry transformation

By Kaylee Cusack /// Photography Michael Hoeft



Minnkota president and CEO Mac McLennan addresses the guests of the cooperative's 83rd annual meeting in Grand Forks, N.D.

The world of rural electric cooperatives is evolving at an unprecedented pace, but one tradition holds fast at Minnkota Power Cooperative: the gathering of co-op members and supporters for the ever-essential annual meeting. The spring ritual continued at Minnkota's Grand Forks headquarters on March 31, as more than 150 member delegates, employees and guests at-

tended the dual annual meeting for Minnkota and Square Butte Electric Cooperative.

The theme of 2022's meeting was "Powering the Journey Ahead," a nod to the challenging industry transition of the near past, present and future. Minnkota board chair Les Windjue and Square Butte board president Paul Aakre welcomed guests with respective looks

back on a successful 2022. Both board leaders expressed thanks to Minnkota's employees and fellow cooperative board members for their hard work, innovation and resilience through one of the most transformational periods in history.

"As the energy landscape continues to shift around us, we're fortunate to start from a solid foundation," Windjue said. "Our



Minnkota board chair Les Windjue delivers a welcome to the members, employees and guests present at the annual meeting.

membership has provided outstanding support, collaboration and guidance every step of the way. For that, we thank you."

Fortifying the foundation

Among the highlights celebrated at the annual meeting was the successful completion of a three-month planned maintenance outage of Unit 2 of the Milton R. Young Station near Center, N.D. The outage, which ran from September to December, was the longest such outage in the plant's history. During that time, Minnkota employees worked alongside hundreds of contractors to complete more than 50 capital and maintenance projects.

"The outage team had to overcome challenges related to space coordination, material shortages and other supply chain-related issues. However, not one of these challenges was enough to deter their success," Aakre said. "They found smart solutions to obstacles that were beyond their control. We have come to depend on that innovative spirit."

Safety was a top priority of the outage. The team completed the effort with an excellent safety record, concluding an already

noteworthy year for the Young Station. Throughout 2022, plant employees reported zero lost-time injuries, continuing a streak

SERVICE AWARDS

The **Red Lantern Award** is presented at the annual meeting in recognition and appreciation of 10 years of service on a member distribution cooperative board.



Greg Spaulding
Clearwater-Polk
Electric



Les Windjue
Nodak Electric



Luther Meberg
Nodak Electric



Robert Wallner
Beltrami Electric



Glenn Mitzel
Cass County Electric

The **Electric Hammer Award** was established in 1970 by Minnkota general manager Andrew L. Freeman to recognize board directors who have dedicated 25 years of service to their member distribution electric cooperatives.



Wayne Malm
PKM Electric



Douglas Anderson
Cass County Electric

The Square Butte board also passed a resolution recognizing Marvis Thompson of Red River Valley Cooperative Power Association for his 10 years of dedicated service to the board. Thompson retired this year and was replaced by Trevor Sorby.



Square Butte board president Paul Aakre thanks the crew of the Young Station for using innovation and safe practices in 2022.

of safety that reached back more than 870 days. "We would like to thank the Young Station employees for using best practices as they do difficult work that keeps our power reliable," Aakre said.

Vice President of Power Supply Todd Sailer and Vice President of Power Delivery Brendan Kennelly delivered the Operations report, once again commending staff in Center and Grand Forks on a strong safety year. Sailer described the increasingly volatile world of the power supply market, and how Minnkota has seen both challenges and positive outcomes in the shift toward more renewable energy. Kennelly discussed what he calls "the wire side of the business," summarizing a 2022 filled with substation rebuilds, line improvements, distribution automation technology and more.

"The transmission business is also facing rapid change, with all of the investment in infrastructure buildout. It's very complex," Kennelly said. "The efforts that

we have put forth will help position us to meet those challenges, and also capitalize on opportunities that are before us on the transmission side."

Treasurer reports from both cooperatives indicated a strong financial year in 2022. That sentiment was backed with a brief budgetary analysis from Minnkota CFO Kay Schraeder, who explained that although expenses were higher in 2022, higher revenues from power sales to the members and to the power market led to increased margins for the year.

'Defined by relationships'

Minnkota president and CEO Mac McLennan concluded the annual meeting with his perspective, continuing the tone of metamorphosis that threaded the morning.

"Our future is going to be different than it was in the past. It is inevitable," he told attendees. "Your member-consumers' ex-

pectations about what electricity means to them will be more different than it ever was before. We will have to respond to that. And we'll have to best position that while also meeting affordability, reliability and sustainability goals."

McLennan described Minnkota's navigation of national grid reliability concerns as more base-load generation is taken offline. He pointed to Project Tundra (Minnkota's carbon capture and storage initiative) as a way to maintain the reliability of base-load coal while using technology to remove up to 4 million metric tons of carbon dioxide from that electric generation every year. A decision whether to move forward with Project Tundra is anticipated within the next year.

"Nearly half of our portfolio is already carbon free," he said.

"If we're successful with Tundra, we will be one of the fastest-decarbonizing utilities in the United States."

McLennan thanked the employees and board members across the service territory who make power possible in the region, especially in a time of uncertainty. He noted that Minnkota's future "will be defined by relationships" – relationships with the people currently in the room, with employees, with business partners and with other stakeholders.

"We will not be able to do this by ourselves," he said. "I truly believe we have a bright future and that we are on the right path to keep affordable, reliable, and sustainable electricity for all of you. I say this each year – I am very grateful to work for all of you," he added, emotion perceptible in his words.

Annual meeting attendees listen to reports delivered by cooperative leadership.



BOARD OFFICERS ELECTED

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Kalvin Hoff (Cass County Electric)

Anthony Ottem (Cavalier Rural Electric)

Greg Spaulding (Clearwater-Polk Electric)

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Steve Arnesen (North Star Electric)

Roger Krostue (Red River Valley Co-op Power)

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David Kent (Nodak Electric)

Michael Hanson (North Star Electric)

Peter Mosbeck (Red Lake Electric)

Trevor Sorby (Red River Valley Co-op Power)

Shawn Gust (Roseau Electric)

TEAMWORK AT ITS HEIGHT

Photos from recent sky-high transmission project illustrate challenges overcome by Minnkota line crews

By Kaylee Cusack /// Photography Michael Hoeft

Minnkota lineworkers make adjustments at the peak of a new wooden H-frame line structure.

Amid the Ides of March, Minnkota line foreman Butch Tester and his crew were taking on their last large transmission project before the official start of spring. The team was raising a new H-frame structure on Minnkota's 230-kilovolt (kV) line just south of Grand Forks, N.D. Tall snowbanks and low wind chills made it feel like the height of winter, not the cusp of springtime.

But a long-lasting winter has never slowed them before. It wasn't going to slow them now. "You know, construction season never really begins or

ends, season-wise, at Minnkota," Tester said with a grin.

The new transmission structure was one of two H-frame placements that will make room for the new Walle substation planned near Highway 81. Before Minnkota's crew of lineworkers could set the new poles, they first had to simply get to the site.

"There was a lot of snow to remove. That's one of those things we just deal with in the wintertime, especially this year," Tester explained. "You need room to get those five trucks in there. You can't just

clear one path and expect to get everything in that work area.”

After spending a full day clearing the work zone with skid steers and payloaders, the lineworkers had to return three days later to clean up an extra several inches of drifted snow dropped by a weekend blizzard. Soon,

they were harnessed up and ready to rise.

Over two days, the team placed the structure, bolted the cross-arms, lined up the braces, hung the wire, and reinforced it all by lacing the “X” beams in the center. All steps took precision teamwork, from the men in the

buckets to the crane operators on the ground.

“There is a lot of work that goes into changing out these structures,” Tester said, adding that other crews will arrive on the site after the snow melts in May to begin dirt work for the substation. “It all went well.”

A project this size takes a lot of bucket truck and crane work. Four work arms were in the air through much of the construction.



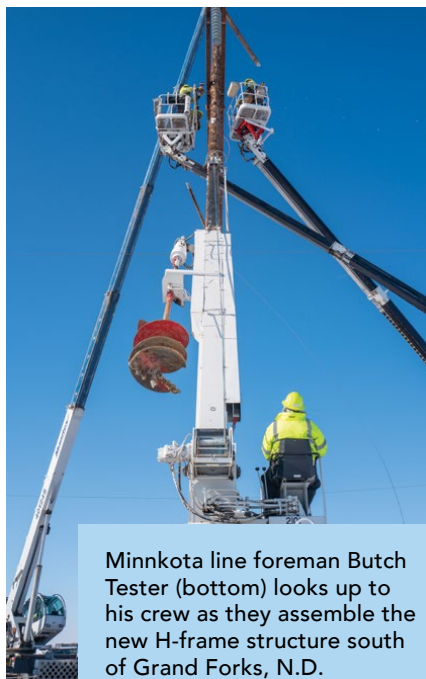
The crew uses concentration and teamwork (and a bit of fearlessness) to assemble the top supports.



Lineworkers Tukker Hammer (left) and Heath James secure insulators on the structure.



Minnkota line foreman Butch Tester (bottom) looks up to his crew as they assemble the new H-frame structure south of Grand Forks, N.D.



A CUT ABOVE THE REST

New Bemidji Steel Company facility puts laser focus on benefits of Beltrami Electric Cooperative territory

By **Kaylee Cusack** /// Photography **Michael Hoefft**

Alex Grasdalen is bending the metal industry to his will. As Bemidji Steel Company's chief operations officer, he has helped reinvent his family business (established in 1983) by offering not just metals locally, but metals molded to fit the global needs of industries ranging from agriculture to aerospace. The company's true springboard to success came in the form of a new facility with smart technology, gigabit internet and reliable power.

And the bulk of the evolution happened in less than three years.

"It's a crazy thing to think about," Grasdalen said, taking a seat at Bemidji Steel's conference room table. "A year

ago, I remember standing in here and it was just stud walls, and the wind was blowing in my face because the windows were delayed."

Bemidji Steel's new state-of-the-art facility sits on a 32-acre patch of land just south of Bemidji, Minn., off of U.S. Highway 71. The team broke ground for the 40,000-square-foot production and office hub in the summer of 2021. Less than a year later, the doors opened to usher in the future of fabrication.

Laser processing and forming are the heart of Bemidji Steel's clean and modern production floor. The company's machines each support a specific task, and each customer is able to build off of its capacity and



The newest Bemidji Steel Company facility is an illustration of modern design, with a sleek exterior and energy efficient interior.

capability. What these clients are looking for are precisely cut and bent, high-quality metal parts to create top-of-the-line products. Bemidji Steel delivers, with intelligence and proficiency.

The company has garnered worldwide attention and now serves a large number of customers across the United States, with a workforce that has grown to 41 employees (up from 11 in 2020). New partners are not only impressed with the facility, but also the company's certification from the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The ISO Quality Management System certification is awarded to entities who prove their processes and procedures consistently meet the product and service standards of customers across the board.

Yes, Bemidji Steel has expanded quickly, but this is only the first of many phases of expansion planned for their new campus.

"The growth plan is aggressive, so knowing we have a power partner here that can sustain that is really important," Grasdalen said.

The right connections

After two years of looking at 20-30 sites for the new Bemidji Steel facility, Grasdalen finally found the perfect campus.

"We reached out to Beltrami Electric and asked them if the power was here, and they were like, 'Yes, it is!'" he recalled. "It



Bemidji Steel's production workflow is highly digitized, helping to ensure precision and consistency.

The production floor of Bemidji Steel Company is clean and quiet, an environment that's not easy to find in many industrial facilities.

was perfect, with the support services already here. That was critical to us, because reliable power was the number-one priority, and internet was the second one."

Bemidji Steel worked with its engineering firm and Beltrami Electric to ensure the building would be energy efficient, making smart electric decisions like LED lighting and a building management system. Many of those choices earned efficiency rebates from the cooperative and have served to keep costs low and reduce environmental impacts.

As the campus continues to grow, the company may explore even more energy solutions like geothermal heating and renewable energy credits from Beltrami Electric's wind and solar programs.

"I enjoy working with Alex – he is energetic and positive and always seems to have a smile on his face," said Bob Gregg, business development manager for Beltrami Electric. "He's very forward thinking and excited to move Bemidji Steel Company into the future. Employees, community and

environment seem to be at the forefront of his priorities."

Grasdalen's passion is contagious. Brian Stefanich, Bemidji Steel's Director of Business Excellence, witnessed it develop early. He was Grasdalen's Bemidji High School principal before heading up the school system's Bemidji Career Academies, which helps students explore post-graduation career paths with the help of local businesses. The two were soon working together again as Bemidji Steel welcomed student interns for work experience. When Stefanich retired from Bemidji Area Schools in 2022, he joined Bemidji Steel's team and continued to work with students utilizing

the Youth Skills Training grant offered by Minnesota's Department of Labor.

"The grant allows students ages 16-18 opportunities to work and get mentored in facilities like ours, in advanced manufacturing. So, we have five high school students who come here every day at 3:30," Stefanich said, adding that interning students often find roles in the company after graduation. "The majority of our laser operators came through the program. They started out as interns, and that's how I got connected with Alex. And now they're mentoring our high schoolers. It's coming around full circle."

With such a strong school-to-work pipeline, Stefanich says that Bemidji Steel is able to avoid the workforce shortage plaguing others in the region. The reputation of the company's environment, culture, cutting-edge technology and endless opportunities has created a waitlist of the local school system's best and brightest.

"It has become THE place to work. It's a privilege to be here and it's an honor to work here," Grasdalen said. "Just this week, we had a 21-year-old employee talking to a 50-year-old engi-



Director of Business Excellence Brian Stefanich (left) and COO Alex Grasdalen work together to offer experiential learning opportunities to local students.

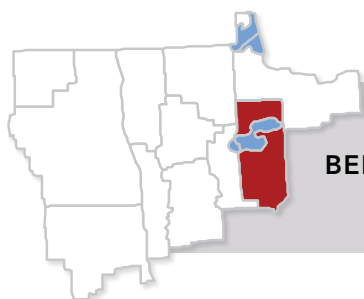
neer in Italy, and he was giving design feedback about how to make their product better. That's what happens."

Although Bemidji Steel could take its sought-after venture anywhere in the country, Grasdalen isn't interested in leaving the place where it all started.

"We have an exceptional team here. We've made a lot of investments in them, and we want to keep them here and keep them employed and continue to give them opportunities to grow so they can enjoy living in Bemidji," he said. "Beltrami Electric all the way to Bemidji State University, everybody is accessible and wants to help, and we all really want to grow together."



An employee prepares to load the next Bemidji Steel shipment.



Served by
BELTRAMI ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
Bemidji, Minn.

Incorporated: July 20, 1940
Board members: 9
President & CEO: Jared Echternach
Members: 21,937
Miles of line: 3,553

HAIRNETS AND HELPING HANDS



Smiles and laughter were present throughout the entire packing process. Upbeat music and silly dance moves contributed to this young helper's contagious smile.

Minnkota hosts third Feed My Starving Children event at its Grand Forks headquarters

By Emily Windjue
Photography Michael Hoeft

As students from Riverside Christian School piled into Minnkota's headquarters on a windy Friday morning, they quickly put on their hairnets and began a familiar routine. When asked how many had ever volunteered at a Feed My Starving Children (FMSC) packing event before, nearly every hand shot into the air with electric enthusiasm.

"The Feed My Starving Children event is not a day where we struggle to find volunteers to come," smiled Cindy Waind, a principal at Grand Forks-based Riverside Christian School. She and her students have been attending FMSC mobile packs since 2011 when Jodie Storhaug and her husband Bruce organized the first event in Grand Forks. Jodie, having volunteered at an FMSC permanent packing site in 2009, saw the difference one person could make with just a few hours of their time.

"There is nothing like seeing the event come together," said Storhaug. "We just visualize it as God working in people's hands and through everyone who

makes it successful. It highlights the goodness of our community.”

FMSC is a nonprofit based out of Minnesota. Representatives from the organization travel coast to coast helping local hosts and communities pack bags full of vitamins, veggies, soy and rice – or MannaPacks – for the millions of people who struggle every day with hunger. The bags are then sent to their 200 partner organizations in over 70 different countries around the world.

Kristen Howard, an assistant manager at FMSC, has made the trek to Minnkota before. She assisted the Storhaugs during their 2022 mobile pack event. After Howard’s experience with the community and the amazing hosts in Grand Forks, she requested to come back for this year’s event.

“It’s enticing to come back to the feeling of community Grand Forks has,” Howard said as cheers from the packers behind her erupted. “You maybe don’t think of Grand Forks, North Dakota, as the most exciting place to travel, but for me it’s about experiencing communities and experiencing hosts that have a passion for feeding kids, and Jodie and Bruce have that.”

A community-first cooperative

The sense of community Jodie and Bruce have inspired is what makes this event such a success each year. Students, realtors, 4-H members, local businesses and other community members all gathered around the various



Hundreds of community members gather around packing stations to scoop the correct amount of ingredients into the MannaPacks.



Volunteers ranged from five years old to 85 years old – with the perfect job available for every ability.



A young volunteer scoops her portion of the ingredients into one of 36 MannaPacks needed to fill a single box at her packing station.

packing stations and worked together in the fight against hunger. This year, volunteers packed an entire semi-truck full of food – around 270,000 bags. And after all these years as a host, Jodie still finds herself holding back tears of joy while watching her community bring this event to life.

“It’s a very strong faith-led thing for me,” she said. “As long as I feel a prompting in my heart from God, Bruce and I will continue to do it.”

As a cooperative, showing concern for community is one of Minnkota’s core values. So, when Minnkota was approached in 2019 about using its facilities

to host the local FMSC crew, the employees grabbed their hairnets, cleared space in the conference center and vehicle garage, and got to work. The relationship with this inspirational organization has continued to grow with each passing year.

“It’s fun to see the same people coming back year after year. It’s like an old friend you haven’t seen in a year,” explained Dave Whalen, Minnkota’s facilities manager who works closely with FMSC organizers. “I’m in the warehouse most of the time during these events and the music is blaring and the people are dancing. It’s such a light-hearted and inspiring event.”

ROUNDING UP FOR THEIR COMMUNITIES

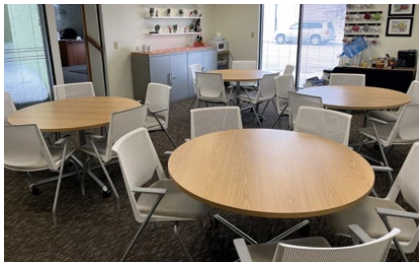
Minnkota members have provided nearly \$7.9 million to charitable causes through Operation Round Up®

By Emily Windjue /// Submitted Photography

Operation Round Up is a program that allows electric cooperatives across the country the chance to make a difference in their communities, and several of Minnkota's members are proud participants. This program offers the cooperative's member-consumers the option

to round up their electricity bill to the nearest whole dollar. The cents collected are put into a fund and then used to create grants, scholarships and other donations that qualifying organizations can apply for throughout the year.

Operation Round Up has been able to fund a vast array of organizations through participating cooperatives in the region. Over the years, here are some of the most memorable donations made by our member cooperatives.



The Memory Café is a non-profit located in Fargo, N.D.

Cass County Electric Cooperative: Lifetime donation of \$3,950,110

Cass County Electric's Operation Round Up program has supported The Memory Café of the Red River Valley. Any person who is experiencing mild to moderate memory loss can go to the café with their care partners to enjoy a safe, supportive and welcoming environment. The Memory Café is a place to create joyful moments for someone living with memory loss.

Beltrami Electric Cooperative: Lifetime donation of \$566,129

One of the first grants ever awarded by Beltrami Electric's Operation Round Up program was to the Beltrami County Sheriff's Office K-9 grant. In November 2021, the fund helped the department welcome RIP, a Belgian Malinois, to its ranks. RIP has been assisting the department in both operations and narcotic detection.



RIP and his handler Deputy Tony Hanson



Clara Beaton and her new interactive whiteboard

Nodak Electric Cooperative: Lifetime donation of \$1,071,811

Nodak Electric's Operation Round Up board of directors meets quarterly to consider applications and award funds. One memorable donation was made to Clara Beaton, a young girl with different learning abilities. The donation was able to assist in the cost of getting Clara an interactive whiteboard to help her participate in the classroom more effectively.



Middle River Veterans Outdoors' mission is to improve the lives of veterans through hunting and fishing adventures and provide opportunities for local youth to hunt waterfowl.

Red Lake Electric Cooperative: Lifetime donation of \$647,991

One of the 1,043 grants given by Red Lake's Operation Round Up program was to Middle River Veterans Outdoors. The grant helped sponsor a youth waterfowl hunt, a veterans ice fishing trip and a range of other hunting events for veterans.

Wild Rice Electric Cooperative: Lifetime donation of \$199,368

Wild Rice's Operation Round Up program made its first contributions in 1996. One organization that has received donations over the years is the Polk County Mounted Posse, an all-volunteer organization. This organization's main duty includes search and rescue since its horses can cover more ground than a person on foot. The funds from Operation Round Up have helped the group purchase flotation devices, wireless solar packs, radio chest harnesses and other necessary items.

Roseau Electric Cooperative: Lifetime donation of \$258,206

Roseau Electric was honored to help the City of Grygla with its ice rink project by allocating funds from Operation Round Up. The Brian Olson Memorial Arena, named after a community member who tragically passed away in a car accident, used the grant to renovate the community arena, which included a new lighting project.



Marey Kazmierczak, Stephen-Argyle Central, SDSU (scholarship recipient)



Carter Vasek, East Grand Forks, U of M – Twin Cities (scholarship recipient)

PKM Electric Cooperative: Lifetime donation of \$232,887

PKM Electric uses its Operation Round Up dollars a little differently than other Minnkota member cooperatives. Every year, 10 or 11 scholarships are created for high school seniors in its service territory. These scholarships are around \$1,000 and help support students with their financial needs while attending colleges like North Dakota State University, South Dakota State University, Northland Community and Technical College and so many more.



Volunteers help pack bags with everything a child could eat for a weekend or school vacation.

Clearwater-Polk Electric Cooperative: Lifetime donation of \$654,847

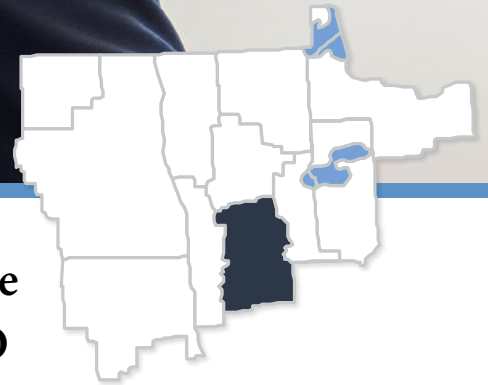
Hunger doesn't end on Friday, which is why Clearwater-Polk's Operation Round Up board decided to allocate funds to support the United Way's Backpack Buddies program. Backpack Buddies ensures that students go home over the weekend with easy-to-prepare food. Bags are packed with entrees, snacks, veggies, fruit and even high-protein items.

North Star Electric Cooperative: Lifetime donations of \$312,430

A total of 133 local charities have benefited from North Star's Operation Round Up program. Its program board of directors works hard to spread the dollars throughout the entire community. A few local organizations that have received funds include local food shelf organizations, community fire departments and emergency responder organizations.

If you are interested in participating in Operation Round Up, contact your local electric cooperative today!

FROM 10-GALLON HATS TO 10,000 LAKES



Texas native Mike Wade brings vast experience to Wild Rice Electric Cooperative as new CEO

By **Kaylee Cusack** /// Photography **Michael Hoeft**

Mike Wade was born and raised on co-op lines in Texas. After graduating from Texas Tech University with a degree in mathematics, he packed his bags to

put his skills to work in the big city: Houston. It seemed like the right thing to do.

“But, of course, growing up in a small town, Houston was not

really where a small-town guy wants to be,” Wade recalled with a smile.

That realization brought Wade back to the world of electric co-

operatives. His passion for rural power allowed him to rise to the level of distribution co-op CEO, most recently bringing his talents to Minnesota as the newest CEO of Wild Rice Electric Cooperative. Wade began his leadership role with Wild Rice Electric on Feb. 13. His first few weeks were a whirlwind of training, board meetings, and advocating for cooperative-friendly legislation in St. Paul. Even with all the initial hustle around the region, he's already picked up on the atmosphere of his new cooperative home.

"I love the teamwork at Wild Rice," he said. "They are very supportive and very helpful. They anticipate the things I might know, or might not know, and they are there to fill in the gaps. They all have a great sense of humor. We all want to work at a place that's fun, and the employees are fun to work with."

Wade noted Wild Rice's welcoming nature extended to its board of directors, who he will be working alongside to ensure safe, affordable and reliable electricity continues to be delivered throughout the service area. "I have a very engaged board, and they ask good questions," he said.

Always growing

Wade began his energy career at Rio Grande Electric Cooperative in Texas – the co-op with

the largest service territory in the United States. While he was there, the co-op served an average of less than one meter per mile of line. It was challenging, but Wade had the opportunity to wear several different hats in his time there. After a couple of years, he decided to try another Texas-sized challenge when he took on a role at Pedernales Electric Cooperative, which boasts the country's highest number of members.

Eventually Wade returned to Rio Grande Electric, where he spent another decade primarily managing the co-op's technical services and engineering. He later accepted an offer to become assistant general manager at a neighboring co-op, and soon thereafter a top job opened in the "far north."

"There happened to be a co-op CEO position open in Wisconsin. I had been through the MIP (Management Internship Program) with NRECA there," he explained. "So, I had a long conversation with the wife and the kids, and when I got the job, we moved to Wisconsin."

Wade brings 10 years of experience as Central Wisconsin Electric Cooperative CEO to his new cooperative family in Mahanomen, Minn. He says he was drawn to Wild Rice Electric due in part to its large and diverse membership, as well as its strong

relationship to a generation and transmission cooperative (Minnesota Power Cooperative).

In his first year at Wild Rice Electric, Wade is eager to learn more about the cooperative from top to bottom. His first priority is to become familiar with Wild Rice's safety program, as well as the co-op's member programs and role in the community. Once the snow melts, he'll be busy getting acquainted with all of the lines and substations in his service area, while also visiting key business accounts and shaking the hands of his new members.

"I want to go meet those members face-to-face. I'm sure it is in Minnesota as it is in any other state – the best way to meet people, even in this new age of videoconferencing, is to have face-to-face conversations," he said.

Although Wade will be busy this summer getting to know his new cooperative system, he's also penciling in some time to enjoy the things that make Minnesota so different from the Lone Star State.

"My wife and I love getting out and seeing new areas. I know that it gets busy in the summer through our service area," he said, referencing the statewide draw of lakes country. "It will be interesting to see what it looks like without three feet of snow."

MINNKOTA PUBLISHES FIRST SUSTAINABILITY REPORT

In March, Minnkota published its first Sustainability Report highlighting the cooperative's commitment to environmental stewardship, community support and accountability in its governance practices. This report will be provided on an annual basis to update key stakeholders and other audiences on the progress made in these areas.

The report focuses on the work Minnkota has done to decarbonize its generation capacity over the last 15 years, while also outlining plans to pursue a major carbon capture initiative, known as Project Tundra. While 42% of Minnkota's generation capacity is already carbon-free, Project Tundra would significantly reduce the carbon intensity of the cooperative's power supply.

Electricity isn't the only topic covered. Minnkota's close bond with its employees, members and local communities is at the forefront of the report. Minnkota is a people-first organization and its principles are rooted in openness, transparency and democratic control. As society changes, Minnkota's member-elected board is responsive to that change and works to best represent friends and neighbors in the communities it serves.

Although America's energy sector is undergoing one of the most transformational periods in its history, Minnkota is well positioned to respond.

The cooperative looks forward to continuing this dialogue through its Sustainability Report and will work to help create an energy future where everyone can thrive.



View the Minnkota Sustainability Report online!