

# Verendrye Network News

Verendrye Electric Cooperative • Velva, N.D.

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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



DECEMBER 2011



## *Merry Christmas!*

from Verendrye Electric Cooperative

**DECEMBER 2011**

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*This Verendrye file photo shows a Verendrye annual meeting in the late 1960s with cooperative leaders among those in the crowd.*

## Verendrye has history of dedicated leadership

*Editor's note: This is the third article in a six-month series explaining cooperative leadership and the advantages of being part of a democratically controlled, member-owned cooperative. Next month's issue will explain how you can get involved in cooperative leadership through the Member Advisory Committee.*

by Tom Rafferty  
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**W**hen Verendrye Electric Cooperative electrified its first 35 homes in 1940, it was a historic accomplishment that took vision, determination and people working together to do what couldn't be done alone.

Rural electrification is one of the greatest grass-roots movements in our nation's history and the rich legacy left behind by the early leaders continues to be an example of how today's cooperative leaders serve those who elect them.

"They were good leaders who had vision and tremendous dedication," said Everett Dobrinski, chairman of the Verendrye board.

That vision continues today as the cooperative grows to meet the electrical demands of a booming regional economy. "No one can predict the future, but they knew things were never going to be the same and they built a framework that allowed for change. This is no longer our father's or our grandfather's cooperative and we need enough vision to see we are going to change some more," Dobrinski said.

### Early days of Verendrye

Forming an electric cooperative from scratch was not easy. The country was coming out of the Great Depression, and before the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) would approve loans to a co-op, organizers had to prove they could sign up enough members to repay the loans.

The dream began in the winter of 1938 when elevator manager H.H. Blackstead and his wife, Dorothy, with the help of P.A.

"Pete" Bolgen and Ed Hammer, began recruiting people to attend a public meeting to discuss the possibility of forming a cooperative.

"If it wasn't for H.H. Blackstead, there wouldn't be a Verendrye Electric. He did a lot of footwork," said board member Cliff Gjellstad. Blackstead and others first tried to convince investor-owned utilities to electrify the rural areas, but they were turned down.

Once the idea of forming a cooperative gained some steam, leaders still had to convince the REA there was enough interest in the idea by convincing people to pay \$3.50 a month and getting them to agree to use at least 40 kilowatt-hours a month (many families today will use that amount of power in one day).

"It was being promoted by Washington and the Roosevelt Administration, but you still had to get yourself in gear and get after it," said Ralph Birdsall, who served on the VEC board from 1971 to 2010. Both Birdsall's father and uncle helped sign up members in the early days of the cooperative.

Despite people's skepticism, the visionaries were able to convince enough members to sign up. They ultimately secured a \$90,000 loan from the REA in September 1939 to build the first 67 miles of line and a substation. Today, the cooperative serves nearly 13,000 meters, and has nearly 4,500 miles of line in a territory covering seven counties.

A lot has changed at Verendrye since the early days, but the core values and principles have remained the same. "You're always working for that member at the end of the line trying to



*Dorothy and H.H. Blackstead helped form Verendrye Electric and were among the first to serve on the board.*



Leon Birdsall, right, a Verendrye board member from 1950-1971, visits with Clyde Ellis, who was the first manager of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Birdsall helped sign up some of the original members of Verendrye and he was one of the original incorporators of Basin Electric.

get him the most affordable energy possible," Gjellstad said. His family's original farmstead was among the first 35 to get power from Verendrye.

#### Leaders as advocates

For decades, Verendrye's board has advanced the interests of its members. Board members were instrumental in developing Central Power Electric Cooperative, a transmission co-op formed in 1949 and Basin Electric Power Cooperative, a generation co-op formed in 1961 that helped free North Dakota cooperatives from having to purchase power from investor-owned utilities. The Verendrye board also formed SRT Communications and North Prairie Rural Water.

Over the years, Verendrye board members have been champions of the cooperative cause politically by fighting for state and federal legislation that favored cooperatives. Today, the board advocates for sound energy policy and encourages members to make their voices heard to fight against Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations that are unrealistic and would cost cooperatives millions of dollars.

Verendrye leaders have also been instrumental in advancing technology. In the early days, some of the first holes for power poles were dug by hand and the cooperative actually encouraged electrical use. Now Verendrye uses technology to improve efficiency and promote conservation. Verendrye has also been a leader in using solar panels to serve remote sites such as pasture wells, and helped lead the way for an expansion in wind energy in the region.

Board members continue to exemplify cooperative principles such as democratic control and concern for community. Some examples include Gjellstad serving on the board of Central Power and serving as chairman of the board of Basin, and Dobrinski, who serves as chairman of CoBank, a \$66 billion bank based in Colorado that lends to cooperatives and other industries across rural America.

From the early days of the cooperative to today, leaders elected by Verendrye members have helped the cooperative not only survive but thrive.

"Co-ops are the way to do business," Birdsall said. "You can do things together that you can never do alone."

COOPERATIVE ENTERPRISES BUILD A BETTER WORLD

## 2012 is International Year of the Cooperative

The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives. Electric cooperatives like Verendrye Electric deliver power to 42 million consumers in 47 states. According to the Washington, D.C.-based National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA), more than 29,200 cooperatives of all kinds employ 2 million Americans. One in every four Americans is a co-op member, but the scope of the cooperative network doesn't stop at the border.

More than 1 billion co-op members exist worldwide, and co-ops generate 100 million jobs globally. Cooperatives strive for sustainable development of communities through member-driven policies, with co-op leaders elected by members.

With the theme of "Cooperative Enterprises Build a Better World," the year seeks to encourage the growth and establishment of cooperatives all over the world.

It also encourages individuals, communities and governments to recognize the agency of cooperatives in helping to achieve internationally agreed upon development goals, such as the Millennium Development Goals.

For more information on the International Year of Cooperatives, go to Verendrye's Web site where there is a link to the International Year of Cooperatives Web site.

CELEBRATE the INTERNATIONAL YEAR of COOPERATIVES!



"Cooperative Enterprises Build a Better World"

# Verendrye awarded 50-year Minot Air Force Base contract

Sen. Kent Conrad applauded the awarding of a 50-year federal contract to Verendrye Electric Cooperative to purchase, maintain and operate the electrical distribution infrastructure on Minot Air Force Base.

"After years of difficult negotiation, it is particularly satisfying to see a proud North Dakota organization like Verendrye providing vital services to the men and women serving our nation in uniform," Sen. Conrad said.

The Air Force estimates the value of the contract to be nearly \$85 million over the 50-year period. Verendrye has provided electricity to the U.S. Air Force since the early 1950s.

Conrad had pushed military leadership to consider Minot as a leading candidate for utility privatization, and has worked continuously to help the process overcome bureaucratic hurdles along the way.

Although Verendrye has served the base for more than 50 years, the cooperative did not own and maintain the power poles, wires, transformers and other distribution infrastructure located on the base. The Pentagon initially developed plans for utility privatization in order to allow installation commanders to focus on core defense missions and functions by relieving them of activities that can be done more efficiently and effectively by others.

"This contract represents a great opportunity to continue our service to Minot Air Force Base, and we appreciate the assistance Sen. Conrad has provided throughout this process," said Verendrye Manager Bruce Carlson. "Having served the base for more than five decades, it is a natural fit for Verendrye to be taking on this expanded role."



*This Verendrye file photo shows crews working on one of two substations on the Minot Air Force Base. Verendrye was recently awarded a 50-year contract to own and maintain the electrical distribution system on the base.*

Although the contract was officially awarded Sept. 30, there is a transition period to learn the distribution system before Verendrye officially takes over the electrical facilities. The contract will mean Verendrye will be building a warehouse to help serve the base and will be hiring more employees that will be dedicated to the base.



## Secret Santas pay bills

Staff at Verendrye Electric Cooperative (VEC) call the donors who anonymously pay others' electric bills "Secret Santas." VEC Credit Manager Cindy Shattuck says Secret Santas – a term coined originally because donations often fall within the holiday season – make partial or full payments throughout the year on bills for families unable to make their monthly electric payments.

Members and employees donate hundreds of dollars to fellow cooperative members that were experiencing hard times. Many grateful families have contacted Shattuck to express their appreciation for the generosity of their unknown benefactors.

If you would like to make a donation, note that it is a Secret Santa gift and let Shattuck know if you want the recipient to know the gift is from you or if you would like to remain anonymous.

Send donations to Cindy Shattuck, Verendrye Electric Cooperative, 615 Hwy. 52 W., Velva, ND 58790.

## Eighth e-bill winner announced

Congratulations to Karen Kramer, of Towner, who won a \$100 bill credit by participating in the e-bill program. To encourage the use of e-bill, Verendrye started a contest in March allowing members a chance each month to win \$100 until the end of the year.

You can enter the contest simply by registering for online access to your bill, or if you already have an online account,

simply log on once each month. If you are not already registered online at [www.verendrye.com](http://www.verendrye.com), you will need your account number and a valid e-mail address to get registered. Once you have the information ready, click on the red "my-e-bill" tab toward the top of the home page. After clicking on "my e-bill," there is a link for new users to register for online account access.

## VEC employees work together to help others

Working together to help others is one of the core values that Verendrye Electric Cooperative employees practice at work and in their off time.

Verendrye employees make a tradition out of many of their volunteer and charitable activities, but this year they added new volunteer activities with the challenges brought by the Souris River flood. Four of Verendrye's employees were impacted by the flood and several of their co-workers pitched in to help them.

"It was nice to see several Verendrye employees mobilize to help each other during the flood," said Tom Rafferty, community relations manager. "There will be a lot more volunteer opportunities as people continue to rebuild and move back into their homes in the coming year and I'm sure Verendrye employees will be there to help."

In addition to helping co-workers, Verendrye employees also pitched in with flood recovery by helping non-Verendrye employees. Other flood recovery activities included answering phones during the Minot Flood Recovery Telethon, helping distribute free primer to flood victims and donating money to help flood victims.

### Helping as a tradition

Employees have fun with many of the various fund-raisers, and in some cases they have made the events traditions. Each December, a group of women from Verendrye's Velva and Minot offices meet in Minot and shop for items to give to children at Christmas.

It is also a tradition for employees, as well as member-owners, to drop off toys at Verendrye offices for the Horn of Plenty, a charity that gives food and toys to needy families in December.

Jeans Day, where employees pay \$1 each Friday for the privilege of wearing jeans, is a way for employees to pool their money for a cause. The funds have been used for various charities, including Verendrye's Secret Santa Fund, which is applied to accounts of member-owners who are struggling to pay their electricity bills.

Other annual fund-raisers employees take part in include the American Cancer Society's Daffodil Days, Rotary Roses, the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life events in Velva and Minot, Alzheimer's Memory Walk in Minot and the March of Dimes.

Some of the support employees give to their communities is not financial. Employees also donate time and labor to various causes, including working at a pancake breakfast to raise money for Dollars for Scholars in Velva or volunteering to serve on the Velva Fire Department and Velva Ambulance.

Whether it's helping recover from a disaster, or continuing a tradition of holiday giving, Verendrye employees are willing to give back to their communities.



VEC women make it a tradition to buy gifts for needy kids each year. Back row from left are: Val Heisler, Sarah Kittelson, Christel Laskowski, Sande Michalenko, Jodi Thomas, Alesha Keller. Front row from left: Katrina Leintz and Cindy Shattuck.



VEC Credit Manager Cindy Shattuck, standing, and Operations Supervisor Dan Kudrna, help Lisa Leintz-Randolph fill sandbags at her home last year.



VEC Assistant Manager Randy Hauck helped answer calls during the Bring Back the Magic Telethon that raised more than \$2 million for flood relief.

## Verendrye promotes Randy Hauck



Hauck

Verendrye Electric Cooperative recently promoted Randy Hauck to the position of assistant general manager. Hauck has been with Verendrye since 1984, serving as member services manager since 1987. Along with his new duties as assistant general manager, he will continue his duties as member services manager.

Hauck has been instrumental in the cooperative's economic development efforts and has held leadership roles on various boards. He is currently vice chairman of the Minot Area Chamber of Commerce and is chairman of both the Velva Economic Development Council and McHenry County Jobs Development Authority. He also serves on the board of the Northern Tier Federal Credit Union and previously served as president of the Velva School Board.

Verendrye General Manager Bruce Carlson said Hauck will do well in his new position. "I congratulate Randy on his promotion. He has proven himself to be a hard-working employee who is dedicated to service excellence for the member-owners of the cooperative," Carlson said.

Hauck has also been recognized for his involvement in economic development and community service. In 2009, he received the Community Service Award from the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives and was named Volunteer Developer of the Year by the North Dakota Department of Commerce in 2006. He holds a bachelor's degree from North Dakota State University.

Originally from Richardton, Hauck is married to Theresa and they have two adult children.

"I'm excited to take on this new role with Verendrye, a growing cooperative with a rich history of serving its member owners and helping communities," Hauck said.



## Orts elected president of Minot Area Homebuilders

Congratulations to Rob Orts, Verendrye member services representative, for being elected president of the Minot Association of Builders. Orts, who was vice president of the association, will assume the duties of president in January. Orts was also named Citizen of the Year by the association. In this photo, Orts, left, received the gavel from Phil Olstead, the 2011 president of the Minot Association of Builders, during the association's annual meeting.

### *Attention students!*

## VEC and Basin offer SCHOLARSHIPS

Verendrye Electric Cooperative (VEC) believes in the principle of helping others in a cooperative way, and that's why each year VEC partners with Basin Electric Power Cooperative to provide area students with the opportunity to earn scholarships.

VEC awards three, \$500 scholarships annually, one per director district, to area high school or college students. High school seniors or college students have until Feb. 10 to apply for the scholarships. To be eligible for the VEC scholarships, students must be dependents of a VEC member and enter college in the fall of the school year for which the scholarship is awarded. Students must complete an application, which is available at [www.verendrye.com/programs/services/scholarships](http://www.verendrye.com/programs/services/scholarships) or by calling or visiting Verendrye Electric's offices in Velva or Minot.

Applicants are required to include a recent academic transcript, copy of a college entrance exam (ACT or SAT scores), a one-page essay and an appraisal completed by a teacher, counselor or supervisor. For questions about the scholarships, call (800) 472-2141.



# NATIONAL RURAL ELECTRIC YOUTH TOUR

High School Juniors and Seniors...

## WRITE A WINNING ESSAY AND WIN A TRIP OF A LIFETIME!

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**And an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C.**

- ▶ To enter the essay-writing contest, you must be a junior or senior in high school in the fall of 2012.
- ▶ You and your parents or guardian must be served by Verendrye Electric Cooperative.
- ▶ Essay is not to exceed two standard 8½- by 11-inch typewritten, double-spaced pages on this topic: **What would your day be like without electricity?**
- ▶ Submit your essay in hard copy or electronic format to Verendrye Electric. Electronic submissions should conform to the two-page, double-spaced guideline described above. Include a cover page with your name, date of birth, school and grade in 2012, parent or guardian's name, address and telephone number.
- ▶ The deadline is **January 30, 2012**. E-mailed entries should be directed to Tom Rafferty at [tomdr@verendrye.com](mailto:tomdr@verendrye.com), and hard-copy entries mailed to: Youth Tour Essay Contest, Verendrye Electric Cooperative, 1225 Highway 2 Bypass E., Minot, ND 58701.
- ▶ If you have a question, contact Tom Rafferty, Verendrye Electric, at the address listed above, or call (701) 338-2855 during regular business hours.



### TOP 3 REASONS TO ENTER THE ESSAY-WRITING CONTEST

1. All-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., compliments of Verendrye Electric Cooperative.
2. A whole week to visit unforgettable historic monuments, museums and the U.S. Capitol.
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