Optimism strong at Verendrye Electric’s 78th annual meeting

Electricity sales stabilized in 2016 and outage times remained well below state and national averages, which has created optimism in what lies ahead for the remainder of 2017.

That good news was reported at Verendrye Electric Cooperative’s 78th annual meeting June 8.

“We are in good financial condition, even though the economy has cooled down. We saw a significant drop in kilowatt-hour sales from 2014 to 2015, but 2016 sales are comparable to 2015,” said Blaine Bruner, chairman of the board.

Manager Randy Hauck said sales could potentially increase in 2017 because of strong sales to industrial users including agribusinesses and oil pipelines. Trinity Hospital has also broken ground on a new hospital in southwest Minot which Verendrye will serve.

“Our very diverse membership certainly helps us get through slower economic times,” Hauck said.

The cooperative finished the year with $50.4 million in revenue and $49.8 million in operating expenses. The operating margin was $684,000.

Hauck also pointed to a graph on the large screen showing an average outage time per meter of about 1.5 hours a year, which is about half of the U.S. average and well below the North Dakota average.

“We had very few extended outages, even though it seemed like we experienced a blizzard every other week,” Hauck said. “We have a very aggressive maintenance plan to maintain 4,600 miles of line and over 50,000 poles.”
Elections

Each year, one director is elected in each of Verendrye’s three districts. This year, directors Maxine Rognlien (East District), Bob Wolf (Central District) and Howard “Bucky” Anderson (Western District) were unopposed for re-election. They serve three-year terms.

Tradition continues

The annual meeting continues to draw a crowd, with around 3,200 attending. The traditional meal featuring meatballs and mashed potatoes was served by Homesteaders Restaurant and local fiddler Shelby Huston was a hit with attendees.

One change members may have noticed was no ice cream truck parked in the middle of the dining hall. The truck was sold to someone out of the area, so a bright yellow Verendrye truck took its place. Since there was no ice cream truck, freezers were hauled in to store the ice cream until it was served.

Members also picked up their capital credit checks, totaling $600,000. If you were not at the meeting to pick up your check, it will be mailed to you if it is at least $5.

Several prizes were also given out. No one won the $2,000 prize that is drawn from among all of the members of Verendrye Electric, but Sylvia Domsten won the consolation prize of $780.

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Fiddler Shelby Huston, who graduated from Minot High School this year, performed at the annual meeting with accompanist Selmer Moen.

Ralie Aberlie, of Minot, won the kid’s bike.
Great Plains Synfuels Plant: The other 20 percent of the lignite industry

Coal mines and power plants are what most people identify with North Dakota’s lignite industry, but no two are the same. The most unique facility in the North Dakota lignite fleet is the Great Plains Synfuels Plant, owned and operated by Dakota Gasification Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of Basin Electric Power Cooperative.

The plant converts lignite into synthetic natural gas, but it also produces another nine valuable products, including fertilizers for area farmers and carbon dioxide that is used for enhanced oil recovery in Canadian oil fields.

The Synfuels Plant has approximately 700 employees as a permanent workforce – which makes it the largest single plant or mine in North Dakota. It even has its own fire department.

Dale Johnson, the plant manager, has been working at the Synfuels Plant since 1985. He describes the plant as “the Disney World for engineers.” Johnson, who earned a chemical engineering degree from Montana State University, says the plant turns lignite into a feedstock that can be used to create synthetic natural gas, along with a variety of other valuable products.

“The plant is very complex, but it is also very exciting because there are so many different things going on,” he said. “Gasifying lignite offers a lot of potential to make many different products. The plant’s operations are similar to both a coal-based power plant and an oil refinery.”

Built in the early 1980s, the plant went online in 1984. The original mission of the plant was to gasify lignite, as the United States had gone through a natural gas shortage in the late 1970s. The Synfuels Plant was part of President Carter’s plan to make America less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

The original partners in the plant were all natural gas companies who were looking to supplement their natural gas supplies with synthetic natural gas. When an oversupply of natural gas hit in the mid-1980s, they defaulted on their government loans and Basin Electric Power Cooperative bought the plant from the U.S. Department of Energy in 1988.

Since that time, the price of natural gas has fluctuated with supply. Right now, there is a natural gas glut in the United States, so Great Plains augments its income by producing and selling valuable products.

“We’ve applied a great deal of ingenuity into our operations,” he said. “For instance, we make an ammonium sulfate fertilizer which is part of our flue gas desulfurization system. We remove the sulfur in our flue gas, using an ammonia reagent, and then turn that combination into our DakSul 45 fertilizer that is shipped regionally to enhance agriculture production.”

The plant also diverts some of its synthesis gas stream, which otherwise would become synthetic natural gas, to its ammonia plant where it becomes another valuable fertilizer – anhydrous ammonia, which is shipped out by either truck or rail throughout the region.

The product that gets the most attention is the carbon dioxide that is captured at the plant and is shipped to Canadian oil fields through a 200-mile pipeline from the plant to Weyburn, Saskatchewan. Visitors from all over the world have toured the Great Plains Synfuels Plant to learn more about carbon capture and storage.

“We’ve sold over 30 million metric tons of carbon dioxide to Canadian oil firms who use the CO₂ for enhanced oil recovery,” Johnson said. “We are one of the largest sequestration projects in the world.”

The next product to be made and sold from the Synfuels Plant will be urea. The raw products for urea – a dry granular fertilizer – are ammonia and carbon dioxide. Currently, the urea plant at the site is under construction and is expected to be operating commercially in early 2018.

The Great Plains Synfuels Plant consumes about 18,000 tons of lignite a day, or about 6 million tons a year. The coal is provided by The Coteau Properties Company’s Freedom Mine, which also provides fuel to the Antelope Valley Station and the Leland Olds Station.

The Synfuels Plant gasifies chunks of coal that are 4 inches or smaller, but doesn’t want coal fines – particles that are under a quarter of an inch. The coal fines are transported to
the Antelope Valley Station, which pulverizes its coal before injecting it into its boilers.

“We call it ‘linkage-by-design,’ ” Johnson said. “The mine, the power plant and the Synfuels Plant share a number of things including water, railroad and fuel. We also are a very large consumer of electricity and Antelope Valley Station is a very reliable source of low-cost electricity.”

Johnson, who has spent the last 32 years at the plant, says that he is most proud of the many things that the Great Plains Synfuels Plant has pioneered, such as the CO2 capture project and the ammonium sulfate fertilizer.

“Our logo is the number one, and I think it’s fitting as Great Plains has been a leader not only in synthetic natural gas production, but also in developing other products,” he said. “As the world’s coal industry looks at more gasification technologies, the path that we’ve blazed on the prairie of North Dakota can be part of the innovation and ingenuity of the future.”

As part of the Rip to Ryder event, Harley-Davidson painted the town’s water tower with its logo and colors.

Rip to Ryder

Ryder’s Main Street was full of Harley-Davidson motorcycles June 3 for a special event put on by the iconic motorcycle brand.

Jody Reinisch, mayor of Ryder, said Harley-Davidson contacted him asking the town to host the event. The purpose of the event was to get every one of the 85 residents of Ryder to take a motorcycle safety course and obtain a motorcycle license.

“They wanted Ryder to be the first town in the world to be 100 percent motorcycle compliant,” Reinisch said. While not everyone in town signed up, quite a few did, and the safety course will be held in July at South Prairie School.

Harley officials were in town for several days filming before and during the event. They also painted the town’s water tower for them, putting the Harley-Davidson brand on one side and the name of the town on the other.

It’s pretty cool that they brought all of these people to town. It was quite an economic boost,” Reinisch said.
Around 50 people gathered at the Norway Lutheran Church, rural Towner, to celebrate a $1,700 Operation Round Up grant the church trust received for making repairs to the steeple. The grant to the church pushed the program over the $1 million milestone awarded since the program started in 1996. Operation Round Up is a program where members voluntarily round their bills to the next dollar to help good causes. Go to www.verendrye.com to watch a video about the event.
Bins require clearance from power lines

As rewarding as it may be, farming is an extremely difficult job. It ranks among the top 10 most dangerous professions in the United States. At Verendrye Electric Cooperative, safety is top priority for everyone.

Our farmers work hard to get the job done, and sometimes it’s easy to forget all the necessary steps to take when practicing safe operations. Grain bins play an integral role in the efficiency and profitability of farm and ranch operations, and safety regulations should always be considered when working around these structures.

Whether you’re purchasing new grain bins or remodeling areas that contain existing ones, proximity to overhead power lines must be a considered factor.

- **Safe clearance.** The National Electrical Safety Code requires an 18-foot minimum vertical clearance from the highest point of the filling port of the grain bin to nearby high-voltage wires and a 55-foot minimum distance from the power line to the grain bin wall. See the chart for further guidelines. Changes to landscaping and drainage work can affect clearance heights of power lines, so remember to check these measurements regularly.

- **Filling grain bins.** High-voltage power lines are not insulated, so it’s important to remember to maintain an adequate high-wire clearance when using a portable auger, conveyor or elevator to fill your grain bin.

- **Moving equipment near grain bins.** When moving equipment, such as a hopper or a scaffold, be aware of nearby power lines. Remember to maintain a 10-foot clearance to ensure safety.

Accidents can happen in a split second, which is why your local electric cooperative reminds you to always use caution when working near power lines. If you are considering a plan for a new grain bin or reconstruction of an existing bin’s site, please contact Verendrye Electric Cooperative. Let us assist you in maintaining a safe environment for you and your family.
The National Electrical Manufacturers Association estimates that 60-80% of surges originate from **internal sources** (within a home or business). Keep your valuable electronics **safe** by protecting them from the surges that can **damage or destroy** them.

**What is a power surge?** A power surge is a sudden and unwanted **increase in voltage** that can damage, degrade or destroy electronic equipment. Surges can occur when large appliances, such as air conditioners, turn on and off. Surges can also originate from electric utilities or lightning.

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**LEVELS OF PROTECTION**

**GOOD:**

**Point-of-Use Surge Protection**
- Easy to use - just plug in.
- Only protects electronics plugged into the device.
- Must be replaced over time or after a major surge event.

**BEST:**

**Whole Home Surge Protection**
- Must be installed by a **qualified electrician**.
- Provides protection for your **entire electrical system** at home including large appliances, outlets, and light switches.
- Protects against **larger surges** and provides longer lasting surge protection than point-of-use devices.

No surge protection can handle a **direct lightning strike**. **Disconnect** sensitive electronics if you suspect a surge is coming.

Power strips and surge protectors are **not the same**. Not all power strips offer surge protection.

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