



CURRENT

Serving Morton, Grant and Sioux counties

MARCH 2020

NEWS



PHOTO COURTESY FLASHER PUBLIC SCHOOL

A strong agricultural economy is vital to the long-term well-being of North Dakota, our country and our world

In February, seventh- and eighth-grade students at Flasher Public School talked about the dairy industry, and the important work ranchers are doing in Mor-Gran-Sou's service area, providing dairy products that make tasty treats. Then, the students made ice cream with heavy cream, sugar, vanilla, rock salt and ice. Agricultural Education teacher and Flasher FFA Advisor Macey Kleinjan submitted this photo, on behalf of the school's agricultural education department and FFA chapter. Thank you, Macey, for sharing this lesson and teaching students about the role some of our Mor-Gran-Sou member-producers play in farm-to-fork.

What's inside:

- **Newspapers begin to thrive thanks to new ownership, local news**
- **Director Frederick recognized for community service**
- **Employees earn prestigious award at AT&S Conference**
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'A town without a newspaper is a town without a heart.'

~ Jim Fuglie, former Hettinger resident and Adams County Record subscriber

Building loyalty one headline at a time

Newspapers begin to thrive thanks to new ownership, local news

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CARMEN DEVNEY

Local papers are supposed to cover local news: who brought the winning steer to the county fair; who won Homecoming King and Queen; who entered a float in the community parade.

Jill Friesz, owner/publisher of the *Grant County News* and *Carson Press*, has been producing news in the Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative service area for 24 years. By covering local events and printing highlights, she is recording more than community happenings — she is preserving history.

"I enjoy doing it for my communities," she says.

When she learned two weekly newspapers in the Slope Electric Cooperative service area were closing, she wondered where local people would get their news. Steve Andrist, executive director of the North Dakota Newspaper Association, called to ask if she would consider purchasing *The Herald* and *Adams County Record*. She wondered, if those weekly papers couldn't make it, what would change with a change in ownership?

To find the answer, she drove to Mott and visited with

residents and business owners. She asked if they subscribed to a weekly newspaper, and if not, why. The resounding answer she heard was no; there is no local news and it costs too much money.

She continued her research in Hettinger at the *Adams County Record* office, where she met employees Cassidy Blade and Frank Turner.

"They are fantastic ... young, excited, and they love the profession. I thought, 'I can't let this go,'" she says.

The employees agreed with area feedback that indicated people wanted more local news. That, Friesz knew, she could fix.

"I took a leap of faith and jumped in wholeheartedly," she says.

Less than one week after she took her road trip, Friesz called the publisher and made an offer to purchase the two papers. It was accepted.

While subscribers never missed an issue of their respective papers, the transition was a nightmare for Friesz.



PHOTO COURTESY CASSIDY BLADE

Cassidy Blade and Frank Turner, employees of the *Adams County Record* and *Hettinger County Herald*.

She worked long hours writing copy and laying out pages, and visited residents and businesses, trying to increase subscriptions and sales. She knew she needed help.

“I have a strong faith. I always feel that things will be provided if you believe,” she says. “If you open your eyes and pay attention, something happens. And it has happened to me tenfold just in January alone.”

Luann Dart, Elgin resident and longtime writer/editor for the *North Dakota Living* magazine, approached Friesz and said, “If you can take on extra work, I can, too.” The friends became business partners, and Dart, who is also a Mor-Gran-Sou member, started traveling to cover the local news of southwest North Dakota. Meanwhile back in Hettinger, Frank Turner said he was interested in taking on ad sales, in addition to reporting. Then, a few people stepped forward and said they’d like to contribute photos. Another person offered to sell ads. And just like that, every need Friesz had was filled.

“I wholeheartedly believe those people were sent exactly where and when I needed them,” she says. “I talked to my husband about all those coincidences, and he said, ‘It’s not a coincidence. That’s God working in a very special way.’”

Winning them over

Friesz knew building a reader base and increasing ad sales would take time, when people didn’t know or trust a new publisher.

“I am still working to win them over; to show them we are local, and we are going to cover local news,” she says.

Others expressed gratitude quickly, including Slope Electric member Francie Berg, who emailed Friesz to thank her for ‘stepping up to the plate’ and purchasing the *Adams County Record*.

“It will be nice that we can have a smooth transition and continue under your leadership,” she wrote. “We know it will be good, and could hardly get along without a newspaper!”

Former Hettinger resident Jim Fuglie agreed. Now living in Bismarck, Fuglie has subscribed to the *Adams County Record* for more than 50 years to keep in touch with his hometown. During his years in the Navy, his subscription followed him all over the world.

“Every week, when the mail plane landed on the deck of the USS Oriskany aircraft carrier floating around the Gulf of Tonkin, I’d grab my copy of my hometown paper to remind me what it was back there in ‘the world’ that made what I was doing worthwhile,” he says.

When he learned in December the paper was closing, he says his heart sunk. One week later, he says, “a lady rode in on a white horse from Grant County and saved it.”

“I sent her a letter that said, ‘God bless you, Jill, because a town without a newspaper is a town without a heart,’” he says. “You’re keeping that heart beating.”

Friesz continues to tour the Slope Electric service area on a regular basis, stopping to take photos, have a community presence and hold candid conversations with residents — asking them what they want to see in their papers. The resounding answer is to cover more sports and school events, and lower the cost of the paper.

“In January, we had one new subscriber a day. That was huge!” she says. “We didn’t start with a great base, but people are interested. We are moving in the right direction.”

Lowering the cost

Now the publisher of four weekly papers, Friesz says she wanted to make the pricing more consistent across the board. She felt if she lowered the price of *The Herald* (now known as the *Hettinger County Herald*) and *Adams County Record*, more people would subscribe and the economics would level out. Eventually, she hopes to worry less about the bottom line.

Friesz knows people prefer to get their news in different places. All four papers offer online subscriptions that cost \$33 a year.

While the online subscription eliminates the expense of purchasing paper, and printing and distributing the final product, it still takes labor to produce the content.

To subscribe to any of the weekly papers, visit www.gspublishing.net/ and click the respective business you wish to support.



Reaching more people

To promote upcoming stories or to live-stream breaking news, Friesz turns to Facebook. She also uses the medium to publish the photos she takes at community events.

“When I cover a county fair, I’ll take 2,000 pictures over the weekend. I can only print about 40 in the paper, so I upload all the photos on Facebook to share. People love to see themselves!” she says.

To like and follow the papers on Facebook, search for “Grant County News and Carson Press,” “Adams County Record” and “New England Herald.”

Friesz also targets younger readers by publishing a senior spotlight. The mother of three teenagers, Friesz noticed they flipped to the sports section first. She designs the senior spotlight in proximity to the sports, and says in addition to students learning about their friends and accomplishments in the news, they are getting the feel of the paper in their hands.

“When they go off to college, we hope they will subscribe and stay in touch with what’s going on back home,” she says.

Focusing on a promising future

Following the purchase of the two papers in southwest North Dakota, Friesz started the business GS Publishing LLC. It is the parent company of *Grant County News*, *Carson Press*, *Adams County Record* and *Hettinger County Herald*. Taking care of the details consumed a lot of time, but now that the four papers are streamlined, Friesz says she has more time to grow the business.

She still writes, edits, builds ads, designs pages, and works to grow the number of advertisers and subscriptions. As she slowly shifts some of the work and independence back to staff at the respective papers, she sees progress being made in focusing on local.

The papers hire local employees, fuel local economies and



Jill Friesz and her husband, Eric, are members of Mor-Gran-Sou. Jill is the owner of GS Publishing LLC, the parent company of *Grant County News*, *Carson Press*, *Adams County Record* and *Hettinger County Herald*, is a strong advocate for local news. When reporters from all parts of the state covered the white supremacists who briefly took over Leith, Friesz says her coverage was likely the most intimate because her take was local. “Even though several media outlets came here to report, I still got to cover it in my own way,” she says.

feature local news — everything needed to help rural areas in North Dakota thrive.

Friesz says saving the two papers, and receiving emails from people thanking her and wishing her well, reignited her passion to share the news.

“I would do it all over again!” she says. “To know you are appreciated and that people do care, and they do want the newspaper, that’s enough for us to do what we do.” ■

Bylaws and resolutions for the annual meeting

Under the bylaws, any bylaw amendments or resolutions must be presented to the members in writing in advance of the annual meeting scheduled for July 17. The board of directors has charged the Nominating Committee with reviewing and advising the board of any proposed bylaw amendments and resolutions. Therefore, any proposed bylaw amendments and resolutions should be submitted in writing no later than March 19, and/or they can be presented in-person at the following meeting of the Nominating Committee:

- **March 19, 2020, in the Mor-Gran-Sou office board room in Flasher at 7 p.m. CT**

If you do wish to submit a bylaw amendment or resolution in writing, please forward it to Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative, Inc., Attn: Nominating Committee, P.O. Box 297, Flasher, ND, 58535-0297, before March 19. Thank you.



Lights. Comfort. Connection.

Annual Meeting 2020

Learn about co-op issues;
cast your vote and elect three members
to serve on the board of directors;
and enjoy a hearty meal.



**Mor-Gran-Sou
Electric Cooperative**

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



PHOTO BY NDAREC/LIZA KESSEL

Vern Frederick (center), longtime board director for Mor-Gran-Sou, accepted the NDAREC Community Service Award from **Josh Kramer**, NDAREC general manager and executive vice president, and **Connie Bitz**, NDAREC secretary and board director for Dakota Valley Electric Cooperative.

Longtime director Vern Frederick recognized for community service

COURTESY OF NDAREC

The North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDAREC) recognized Vernard Frederick, a third-generation farmer and lifelong resident of the Flasher community, with the Community Service Award at its annual meeting on Jan. 21.

Serving his 24th year as a

director for Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative, Frederick has lived a life of service to his country, his cooperative and his community. A military veteran, he served as part of the Honor Guard, leading parades and community events, and organizing Memorial Day services at the Flasher Legion

Hall. A man of faith, he became an authorized lay worship leader for his church. As a cooperative director, he proved valuable to the early adoption of Innovative Energy Alliance Cooperative, and has been instrumental in its growth and longevity.

Alan Malm, secretary of the Flasher Masonic Lodge, recommended Frederick for the award. He says there is no one more dedicated to his community. “Vern is a staple in the community. He is a leader in his religious community at the Flasher United Church of Christ, as well as a founding member of the Flasher Lions Club. He is a vital member of the Flasher American Legion and a dedicated Mor-Gran-Sou board member. He is truly deserving of recognition for his efforts.”

NDAREC General Manager and Executive Vice President Josh Kramer says, “Vernard has dedicated a lot of passion to improving quality of life in his community. It is an honor to present him with this award.”

Congratulations, Vern, on receiving this recognition, and thank you for your service to our cooperative and area communities. ■

SAFETY@MORGRANSOU.COM

Mor-Gran-Sou is an advocate of working safely. In fact, it is our way of life; the culture of your cooperative. We look out for the safety of ourselves and others — before, during and after work.

Did you know that members also play a key role in keeping our system safe? At times, you are our eyes in the sky and on the ground. Should you see a power line issue that may need Mor-Gran-Sou’s attention, please call the office at 663-0297, 597-3301 or 800-750-8212, or send us an email at safety@morgransou.com with your concern. This correspondence should include the description of the location, your name and complete contact information, and a photo if possible. Working together helps ensure the safety of all!



MILESTONE ACHIEVEMENT

Mor-Gran-Sou employees earn prestigious award at AT&S Conference



PHOTO BY NDAREC/JOHN KARY

Mor-Gran-Sou employees (from left) **Lance Brown Otter**, **Doug Nagel**, **Charles Pesicka** and **Wayde Eckroth** accepted the Superior Safety Performance Award on behalf of the cooperative.

The North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDAREC) hosted the 56th annual REC Apprenticeship Training and Safety (AT&S) Conference Jan. 15 to 17 at the Ramkota Hotel in Bismarck. The conference is sponsored by the NDAREC AT&S program, with cooperation from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Apprenticeship.

The conference drew representatives of NDAREC member-cooperatives, students of the Bismarck State College lineworker program and the electric industry for classroom sessions, equipment evaluations and awards ceremonies. Training topics included fault locating, self-rescue,

reasonable suspicion, personal protective grounding and bonding, 200/600-amp product evolution and application, cutouts, and how safety empowerment is the key to preventing disasters.

Christina Roemmich, director of safety services for NDAREC, says the AT&S conference provides an opportunity to reflect on current issues in the industry, and to recognize the accomplishments the linemen have made in training and safety throughout the year.

Mor-Gran-Sou employees who attended this year's conference included General Foreman Doug Nagel; Engineering Technician Jesse Kuhn; Journeyman Linemen Lance Brown Otter, Wayde Eckroth and

Blake Reis; and Apprentice Lineman Charles "CJ" Pesicka.

At the conference awards banquet, Mor-Gran-Sou was one of five distribution cooperatives in North Dakota to be presented with a Safety Award. They were recognized for having zero OSHA-recordable injuries for one year, between the dates of Dec. 1, 2018, to Nov. 30, 2019.

Roemmich says OSHA, or the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, requires electric cooperatives to track work incidents through record-keeping.

This was the tenth year in a row Mor-Gran-Sou has received the award.

To commemorate this milestone achievement, Mor-Gran-Sou received a Superior Safety Performance Award, which Roemmich says is the first and only time Statewide has issued this award.

"Mor-Gran-Sou and their employees have worked more than half a million hours through several major ice storms and normal business activities and countless outages without a serious accident, let alone a lost-time injury," she said. "It is commendable for any cooperative to go without a lost-time injury in a 12-month period. To go 10 consecutive years is remarkable. Their achievement speaks of a strong culture of safety."

To all the employees of Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative, congratulations! You are part of the progress. ■

MOR-GRAN-SOU ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

board meeting highlights



Meeting date: Jan. 29, 2020

- Approved the Dec. 18, 2019, Board meeting minutes
- Approved a special equipment capitalization
- Approved a work order inventory
- Reviewed and accepted the director and attorney expense reports
- Approved the capital credit refund applications to estates and those age 80 and over
- Reviewed the unaudited financial report for December
- Heard update on Southwest Power Pool
- Reviewed senior staff department reports
- Heard the Co-General Managers/CEOs updates, and reports on meetings they attended
- Heard reports from various meetings, training and events the directors had attended
- Confirmed director attendance at upcoming meetings
- Reviewed CoBank notice for 2020 director election
- Directors completed annual REPAC and ACRE memberships
- Approved audit engagement letter for 2019 records
- Directors held Executive Session with auditor
- Approved annual renewal of the Mutual Aid Agreement
- Approved the annual CIO Red Flag Report
- Nominating Committee was invited for discussion and lunch
- Approved 2019 physical inventory adjustment
- Discussed proposed Bylaw amendments for 2020
- Held Executive Session

Upcoming regular board meeting date:

March 25
in the NDAREC board room, Mandan

Members are welcome to attend the board meetings at any time. Please contact Mor-Gran-Sou at cternes@morgransou.com, or call 1-800-750-8212 or 597-3301 to confirm the meeting date and location if you wish to attend.

To place an item on the agenda, please contact Board Chair Casey Wells or Co-General Manager/Chief Executive Officer Donald Franklund at 701-597-3301 at least one week in advance.

Members may obtain a copy of approved board minutes by completing and returning the "Request for Information or Data" form. You can find this form at www.morgransou.com, or contact the Flasher office to request a copy.



SPRING AHEAD!

ON **SUNDAY, MARCH 8**, DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME BEGINS. REMEMBER TO SET THOSE CLOCKS FORWARD ON SATURDAY, MARCH 7, BEFORE YOU RETIRE FOR THE EVENING.

A phone survey may await you

Members: Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative will be completing a random residential telephone Member Satisfaction Survey. Performed by Odney Advertising and conducted by the University of North Dakota, this survey will take place in March.

If you receive a call from Odney Advertising or UND on behalf of Mor-Gran-Sou, please take time to answer the questionnaire. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes. By participating in the 2020 Member Satisfaction Survey, Mor-Gran-Sou receives better insight into how we can better serve you, the member-owner.



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OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

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Vice Chair..... Chad Harrison
Secretary-Treasurer..... Lance Froelich
Directors Mark Doll, Vernard Frederick,
Pam Geiger, Jay Larson,
Bob J. Leingang, Kathy Tokach

MANAGEMENT

Co-GM/CEO..... Donald A. Franklund
Co-GM/CEO..... Travis Kupper

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