



MOR-GRAN-SOU
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Serving Morton, Grant and Sioux counties

THIS ISSUE:

- Franklund retires
- Poster contest announced
- Remembering Robert Gipp

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Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

Bentz announced as co-general manager/CEO

BY ANNE HANSEN

Lineworkers in the energy industry learn early in their careers they will face various challenges on a regular basis. These challenging conditions prepared Jason Bentz for his new role as co-general manager/CEO of Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative.



Jason Bentz

In late 2022, the Mor-Gran-Sou board of directors announced Bentz will join Travis Kupper in leading the cooperative, beginning in 2023.

“Jason’s experience and leadership will be instrumental to our success, as we continue to serve the needs of our membership,” says Director Kathy Tokach.

Serving the cooperatives

From a young age, Bentz recalls his interest in the electric service industry. His basic understanding of the profession came from a cousin who served as a cooperative lineworker for many years.

“I was always interested in being able to work with my hands while being outside. And since I wasn’t afraid of heights, I thought I would pursue a career as a lineman,” Bentz says.

He pursued his goals, and after receiving the required training from Bismarck State College, Bentz headed out of state to work for Thiel Construction in Nebraska and Oklahoma. During his first transmission job, Bentz remembers feeling validated in his career choice.

“When I was on my first transmission project in Nebraska, I was working on a 230-kilovolt and asked to go unclip wires in preparation for new

wires to be pulled in. While on a 90-foot pole, which was situated on top of a 300-foot plateau, I thought, ‘Yes, I made the right choice,’ as the view was spectacular,” he says.

Although Bentz enjoyed working for Thiel Construction, his goal was always to return to his home state of North Dakota. That goal was made a reality when he received a job offer from Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative in Flasher as an apprentice lineworker.

“I remember my first job at Mor-Gran-Sou Electric was changing out a transformer at a pasture well tap west of Elgin with Foreman Mark Hoffman,” he says.

Growing into a cooperative leader

For the next several years, Bentz continued to work his way up in the cooperative, rising from apprentice to journeyman lineworker and foreman.

“I have always wanted to take opportunities and grow with them and try my best to serve



Jason Bentz served as a lineworker early in his career.

continued on page C2



continued from page C1



Jason Bentz served as a lineworker for Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative early in his career.

others, and give others the opportunities to grow as well," he says.

For 20 years, Bentz did just that at Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative, before transitioning to operations manager and chief of staff at Roughrider Electric Cooperative in Dickinson, beginning in 2013.

Although Bentz recognizes being a lineworker is not a glamorous or easy profession, the skills learned, including commitment to safety, understanding shortcuts are not an option and a dedication and sense of service, have prepared him for his new role.


This also includes his understanding of working as a team.

"In life, and in a career in the energy industry, you cannot be very successful without a good team," Bentz says, noting his good fortune of working alongside influential teams and leaders throughout his career, which helped shaped him

into the person he is today.

"I have always had good role models and mentors, starting with my parents, who taught me to work hard, to do a job well and to never pretend to know the answers if you don't," Bentz says. "In addition to my parents, the leaders out in the field have taught me to not be afraid to ask questions, and most importantly, always listen to understand."

Bentz looks forward to his new role, and to using the skills he has gained along the way to continue moving the cooperative in the right direction, while working alongside Kupper.

"I will try and make the plans a reality to help our member-cooperatives succeed in an ever-changing industry. We need to be mindful of the members and keep providing reliable, affordable power, and keep looking at new technologies," Bentz says. 

Franklund retiring from Mor-Gran-Sou Electric

BY ANNE HANSEN

After more than 46 years in the industry, and 28 years as co-general manager/CEO of Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative, Don Franklund has retired.

Early beginnings

Sleeves rolled up and ready to work, Franklund, 16 years old at the time, received his first taste of serving cooperative members by trenching cables for Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative. Little did he know that several years later, Franklund would be returning to the cooperative, but in a much different capacity.

For Franklund, the energy industry was always a passion, stemming from his father, who was an electrician. After graduating from Mandan High School, he obtained a degree as a lineworker. A year into the field, during a stormy night changing crossarms in the hail, he vividly remembers asking himself if he wanted to do this for the rest of his life.

After that experience, Franklund found another field in the energy industry and went back to school to pursue a degree in electrical engineering from North Dakota State University. His new degree led him out of state to Denver, Colo. Although he traveled to a few more states for employment opportunities, his heart returned him home to North Dakota to raise his family.

In 1991, Franklund was hired as general manager/CEO for Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative. Franklund reflected that his first day of work would serve as an omen for his career.

“On my first day as general manager, I was driving from Bismarck to Flasher, and Highway 6 was under construction, which resulted in no pavement and a little bit of a bumpy ride. On the way home that night, I received a flat tire,” he said. “The road isn’t always smooth, and it is likely to have rough patches and stops along the way, but it’s all about the people that are along on the journey with you, and that is how you determine the quality of your journey.”

Innovating along the way

In 2007, many electric cooperatives were struggling with a declining membership and an



Don Franklund speaks at an annual meeting

increased cost of doing business. To survive, they needed to find innovative ways to prepare for the future. When Slope Electric Cooperative’s general manager resigned, the Slope board approached the boards of Mor-Gran-Sou and Roughrider Electric Cooperative and suggested they form a temporary management alliance.

“It was a bold step toward managing all of our cooperatives’ futures,” Franklund said.

The alliance would allow the cooperatives to remain as separate businesses with their own identities, assets and obligations, and retain their authority. Franklund embraced the spirit of an alliance, which supports the sharing of employee skills, equipment and more.

During his time serving as co-general manager and CEO of KEM Electric, Mor-Gran-Sou Electric, Slope Electric and Roughrider Electric Cooperative, Franklund has seen many changes and challenges along the way.

“I remember as a new manager in 1994, a manager in the mid-60s approached me and told me he was jealous of all the things I was going to be able to see and do during my career,” he said. “I never understood that until recently, and now I am the one jealous of all the things the cooperatives will get to see in the coming years as we face a changing industry. Yet, some of my fondest memories are happening now, as I see the fruits of my labor mature and see employees who we have hired as young individuals grow into what they are today.”

Lasting impact

Over the years, Franklund has attended over 1,000 board meetings, 73 annual meetings and has met countless individual members and mentors.

“Along the way, I have found it best to always

continued on page C4



continued from page C3

focus on the mission on why we exist – to provide affordable, reliable and safe energy for our members,” Franklund said.

“Don’s focus has always been on what best serves the member,” said Co-General Manager/ CEO Travis Kupper. “He has a knack for evaluating every situation and making sure that every option has been explored to find the best solutions for the cooperative member.”


That focus throughout the years earned Franklund the respect of many of his peers, and many look to him for advice and counsel.

“While having a co-manager is a unique situation, it has served as a peer sounding board. I will be forever grateful for the years I have been able to work with him in this capacity,” Kupper said.

The North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives noted Franklund as an effective spokesperson and leader, and a strong representative of North Dakota’s electric cooperatives, when he was awarded the Cooperative Leadership Award.

Franklund credits those who have mentored him throughout the years.

“I had so many colleagues along the way who didn’t think they were mentors, but were,” Franklund said. “That included people like Bob McPhail, Ron Harper, Vern Dosch, Paul Sukut, Jeff Nelson and so many more.”

Mor-Gran-Sou wishes Franklund the best in his retirement and future endeavors, and thanks him for the years he has spent serving our members. 

MANAGER’S MESSAGE: Giving back to our communities



Travis Kupper

Over the past year, you’ve probably heard or read about Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative’s concern for our community. This is one of the core principles that sets cooperatives apart from other types of utilities and businesses. We’ve always taken this mission and responsibility to heart. It’s

who we are as a co-op.

Now, with the holidays behind us, it has made me pause and reflect on the role we play in our rural area. While our purpose is to provide safe and reliable energy to you, the members we serve, we have a greater mission – to be a catalyst for good.

You’re probably aware of our Operation Round Up program, in which we take donations from generous members like you who have “rounded up” the amount due on their electric bill to the highest dollar to donate to local charities. Or our Youth Tour program, in which we take our community’s brightest young people to

Washington, D.C., for a weeklong immersion to experience democracy in action.

You’ll also see our employees serving on local boards, coaching youth sports and volunteering at charitable events. Because when you work at a co-op, you understand how important a strong community is. After all, without you, the co-op wouldn’t exist.

We know our core job is to keep the lights on, but our passion is our rural areas, and we want to make them a better place for all.

If there’s anything we can do to help you, whether providing energy-saving advice to help lower your monthly bill or discussing payment plan options, please reach out to us at 800-750-8212, 701-663-0297 or 701-597-3301.

Concern for community is the heart and soul of who we are. And no matter what the future brings, you can count on your electric co-op to care about you. 

Mor-Gran-Sou's annual meeting scheduled for July 21

Are you looking for a way to serve the people of central southwestern North Dakota? Look no further, as Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative can help you fulfill that desire. Why not serve as a board director for the cooperative?

The initial commitment is a three-year term, with provisions in the bylaws limiting a director to serving six consecutive three-year terms, after which time the director is not eligible for another six consecutive three-year terms until one year has elapsed.

At the annual meeting, the following three board positions will be elected:

- The Grant County position presently held by Casey Wells (currently serving his fifth three-year term)
- The Mandan area position presently held by Bob Leingang (currently serving his fifth three-year term)
- The Sioux County position presently held by Rodney Froelich (currently serving his first three-year term)

Under the bylaws and due to the use of a mail-in ballot, no nominations are accepted from the floor at the annual meeting. Instead, the bylaws require the board of directors to appoint a Nominating Committee of five to nine members who geographically represent the cooperative. These members will provide a list of qualified and willing candidates to the board for approval and inclusion on the ballot at the board of directors' meeting scheduled for March 29, 2023. This date has been set so there is adequate time for each candidate's biographical information to be included with the notice of meeting sent to the members in June, along with the mail-in ballot for those who are unable to attend the annual


meeting in-person.

The Nominating Committee has been appointed by the board and will meet for the first time on Jan. 10, 2023. The members of the Nominating Committee include Jennifer Bonogofsky, St. Anthony; Jackie Buckley, Mandan; Rosie Erhardt, Mandan; Glenda Gross, Selfridge; Garek Murphy, Fort Yates; Jim Neubauer, Mandan; Toby Olin, New Salem; Donald D. Roth, New Leipzig; and Yvonne Seidler, New Leipzig.

For a person to be nominated, the member vying for a board seat must submit the completed declaration of candidacy form to Mor-Gran-Sou by 4 p.m. CT (3 p.m. MT) on Thursday, March 16, 2023. The completed form must be mailed to Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative, Attn: Julie Armijo, P.O. Box 1090, Mandan, ND 58554-7090.

If you or someone you know is interested in being nominated, please contact one of the Nominating Committee members or Julie at Mor-Gran-Sou by calling 800-750-8212, 701-663-0297 or 701-597-3301. You can also email Julie at jarmijo@morgransou.com.

The Nominating Committee members can provide you or the potential candidate with the declaration of candidacy form. It is also located on Mor-Gran-Sou's website, www.morgransou.com/forms-and-applications. If you have questions about the process, give Julie a call.


All qualified and willing candidates who have completed and forwarded the written declaration of candidacy form to the Mor-Gran-Sou office by the March 16, 2023 deadline will be included in the list the Nominating Committee will provide to the board. 

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 21, 2023. 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 20, 2023, and/or they can be presented in-person at one of the following in-person meetings of the

Nominating Committee:

- Jan. 10, 2023, in the Mor-Gran-Sou office board room in Flasher at 7 p.m. CT or virtually
- March 20, 2023, in the Mor-Gran-Sou office board room in Flasher at 7 p.m. CT or virtually

If you do wish to submit a bylaw amendment or resolution in writing, please forward it to Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative, Attn: Nominating Committee, P.O. Box 297, Flasher, ND, 58535-0297, before March 20, 2023. Thank you. 

Safety Starts with ME: Jackie Miller

“At Mor-Gran-Sou Electric, we do our best to maintain our system to ensure readiness for all types of severe weather and to reduce the number of outages, but Mother Nature can be unpredictable,” said Jackie Miller, Mor-Gran-Sou’s chief of staff.

That being said, outages are inevitable. Here at Mor-Gran-Sou Electric, our line crew takes necessary safety precautions when restoring power for you, our members.

However, our line crew’s safety remains in your hands. When using portable generators in the event of a downed power line, this can prove to be dangerous and, in some cases, fatal to our lineworkers when used incorrectly.

A generator plugged into a home’s wiring or regular household outlet can cause backfeeding along power lines and electrocute anyone that comes into contact with them, even if the line seems deenergized.


Not only does this cause danger for our lineworkers, but also for our members. If a generator is used improperly, generator owners may also be at risk of electrocution, fire injury, property damage or carbon monoxide poisoning.

Here are some tips to ensure you are using a generator correctly:

1. Never connect a generator directly to your home’s wiring unless your home has been wired for generator use.
2. Always plug appliances directly into generators.
3. Use heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cords.
4. Ensure your generator is properly grounded.



5. Never overload a generator.
6. Turn off all equipment powered by the generator before shutting it down.
7. Keep the generator dry. Operate it on a dry surface under an open structure.
8. Always have a fully charged fire extinguisher nearby.
9. Never refuel a generator while it is operating.
10. Read and adhere to the manufacturer’s instructions for safe operation.

We encourage you to protect the well-being and safety of your family as well as those that assist in bringing power to you, our members. Contact Mor-Gran-Sou Electric for more information regarding generator hookups. 

Remembering Robert Gipp

As we look forward to 2023, it’s fitting to take time to look back on 2022 and pay tribute to those we lost, who were part of the Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative family. It was with great sadness we learned Bob Gipp, who served as a Sioux County director from 1976 to 2003, died Oct. 31, 2022.

The second oldest of four brothers, Gipp was born on Sept. 14, 1938. Gipp graduated from Fort Yates High School in 1957. His early claim to fame

was winning the 1956 state Class B boys basketball championship as a member of the Fort Yates Warriors team his junior year. After graduating from high school, he attended Ellendale Teachers College and received his bachelor’s degree in elementary education. In 1959, he married Lonna and they raised four children. Bob taught school in various locations before returning home to Fort Yates and working with the Bureau of Higher Education. In 1971, Bob and his family began a



Robert Gipp

cattle and horse ranch. While he continued ranching, he, along with a collaboration of many, inspired the creation of Sitting Bull College in Fort Yates. There, he served as a board trustee, chairman and acting president. Bob was also a founding member of the Standing Rock "Honor Our Chiefs" Ride and a supporting participant of the Wounded

Knee Massacre Big Foot Memorial Ride. His concern for his community, including the membership of Mor-Gran-Sou, and his family were important to him.

Bill Koch, a former director, served on the board with Bob and developed a lasting friendship with him.

"Bob was a very friendly, knowledgeable, patient, fair, and on occasion, a stern man, and he demonstrated these traits during board meetings.

He made friends with many other rural electric cooperative directors across the state. As a board member, he was concerned about the future of electric cooperatives," Koch said.

"It indeed was a pleasure to be a friend of Bob's, and once you were a friend, you remained his friend. One of Bob's memorable quotes was, 'Thank you to everyone who shook my hand.' That phrase was true to the end of his life," Koch said.

"Bob was outgoing, giving and always ready to help anyone that needed it. Bob and his wife, Lonna, were married 62 years. He was a family man, a true cowboy and rancher. I am very proud to have been an acquaintance and friend of Bob's for the past 42 years," Koch said.

To his family and friends, please know how much we appreciated Bob's shared time and talents as he served the members of Mor-Gran-Sou Electric and the board of directors and staff express our heartfelt condolences; he will be deeply missed.

A tribute to former employee Henry Benz will appear in next month's pages.

BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

- Approved the Oct. 26 board meeting minutes
- Approved a special equipment capitalization
- Approved capital credit retirement applications for estates and those age 80 and over
- Reviewed co-general managers/CEOs update
- Reviewed senior staff and general counsel reports
- Adopted board governance director compensation policy
- Elected a Mor-Gran-Sou director and alternate to Innovative Energy Alliance-Maintenance Solutions Cooperative board of directors
- Approved 2023 budget
- Elected a Mor-Gran-Sou director to serve on the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives board of directors
- Heard director board member reports
- Discussed annual meeting
- Discussed Nominating Committee
- Reviewed October financial report

- Reviewed and authorized voting delegates and alternates for upcoming meetings.
- Reviewed upcoming meetings

Upcoming regular board meeting dates:

- Jan. 25, 10 a.m. CT/9 a.m. MT

Members are welcome to attend board meetings. As plans may change, please call the office at 800-750-8212 or 597-3301 to confirm the meeting status if you wish to attend. To place an item on the agenda, please contact Board Chair Steve Tomac or Co-General Managers/CEOs Travis Kupper or Jason Bentz 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.



MOR-GRAN-SOU
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UNDERGROUND LINE LOCATES
800-795-0555 OR 811

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

Chair Steve Tomac
Vice Chair Chad Harrison
Secretary-Treasurer Pam Geiger
Directors Mark Doll, Rodney Froelich,
Bob J. Leingang, Ryan Petrick,
Kathy Tokach, Casey Wells

MANAGEMENT

Co-GM/CEO Travis Kupper
Co-GM/CEO Jason Bentz

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