

North Dakota firms riding energy wave

Staff Report

Even as the energy boom helps drive prosperity across the Northern Plains – especially in western North Dakota – there are two companies in the Fargo area that are supplying products and services to the many diverse energy sectors and experiencing growth rates that parallel the healthiest of energy companies.

Border States Electric (BSE), founded in Fargo in 1952, has been supplying coal, oil, and other energy development projects pretty much since its founding. Now an employee-owned company with 1,300 employees at 50 locations in 11 states and Mexico, BSE provides transmission and distribution equipment, including diverse supplies like cabling and grounding equipment, all the way up to transformers, for the electric



Barry Nelson, Vice President - Marketing, Border States Electric, Fargo, ND

generating and transmission business.

“In the last two to three years we’ve sharpened our focus on the energy sector,” admits Barry Nelson, vice president of marketing for the firm. “We’re very well positioned to serve the energy industry, including the energy exploration activities in the oil field and construction of energy plants of all kinds.”

Led by Tammy Miller, president/CEO, Border States Electric has sales approaching \$1 billion and has achieved significant influence in the industry, with Miller serving as the first woman president of the National Association of Electrical Distributors. Miller is a native of Brocket, ND and a graduate of Minnesota State University Moorhead.

“With our structure as an ESOP, we’re able to leverage the creativity of people who are absolutely committed to serving our diverse client base,” says Nelson.

Perhaps installing equipment provided by BSE, Wanzek Construction has seen its staff burgeon to over 840 employees in recent years, working on energy-related projects in 10 states. Based in Fargo/Mapleton, Wanzek was founded 37 years ago by Leo Wanzek and is currently led by son Jon Wanzek, who became president of the firm this past summer.

“We’re doing a lot of work in the renewable sector, including the unique combine heat power (CHP) project at the Great River Energy plant near Jamestown,” says Jon Wanzek. “We’re also breaking new ground with a biomass gasifier near Benson, MN, with about 70 percent of our entire workload related to 10 ethanol plants underway and wind

projects in six states through lots of strategic alliances that capitalize on our core competencies in site work, concrete, structural steel, piping, millwright work, mechanical completion, and the placement of equipment and vessels.”

The placement work is often accomplished with Wanzek’s growing fleet of cranes, including 550-ton and 650-ton Terex D-Mag cranes and two 275-ton crawler cranes arriving soon from Japan.



Jon Wanzek, President, Wanzek Construction, Fargo/Mapleton, ND

“There is a worldwide shortage of crawler cranes right now, with waiting times approaching two years, so we’re pleased to have obtained these,” Wanzek notes. “It’s also been particularly gratifying to be able to bring back about 10 families to the area with the increase in our workload ... most of it (about 80 percent) as projects with repeat customers.”

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