

Wind energy's vital impact on our community

By TAMMY J. JOHNSON, Hardwick City Clerk, Letter to the City of Hardwick • Posted: January 28, 2013

Hardwick is a town located in SW Minnesota about 10 miles north of Luverne and about 40 miles from Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I have been the City Clerk for approximately twenty five years. When I became clerk, our population was approximately 325.

PRAIRIE ROSE WIND FARM

The Prairie Rose Wind Farm is an operating 200 megawatt wind farm in Rock County, Minnesota. Rock County is located in the wind-abundant southwestern part of Minnesota, on an area called the Buffalo Ridge. The average wind speed in Rock County, measured at 80 meters, is 8.3 meters per second. The average wind direction is from the northwest and south. The Prairie Rose Wind Farm's footprint spans over 25,000 acres and boasts 125 turbines. A second phase of the project, named Prairie Rose II, is in development and will supply an additional 100 megawatts in the neighboring Pipestone County. Both counties are ideal for wind development due to strong wind resource, enthusiastic landowners, a welcoming community, and available transmission opportunities.



Twenty five years ago Hardwick had two gas stations, two cafes-lounges, a very active grocery store, a very busy bank, a meat locker, a repair shop, post office, church and one of the busiest grain elevators in the area.

Eventually **both gas stations closed**. The **grocery store closed** about five years ago. Everyone assumed it would re-open. It didn't. The meat locker has closed; the man that ran the repair shop passed away and no one reopened his shop. One of the bars/cafés closed about five years ago. The elevator was gobbled up by a larger elevator to remain competitive in today's market. **The post office is threatened**.

The Green Lantern Café-Steakhouse-Lounge, which made Hardwick famous over 100 years ago, struggles. I can be in the Cities writing a check and someone will ask if they still have that good eating place, The Green Lantern, in Hardwick. Lawrence Whelk played in Hardwick years ago and people would eat and patronize the Green Lantern.

Hardwick had many **empty houses** for sale as folks moved or passed away. Some became eyesores and infested with rodents the longer they sat empty.

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AND THEN about two years ago two gentlemen from Enel Green Power passed through Hardwick looking for a possible home for their O & M facility for the Prairie Rose Wind Farm which was to be built by Geronimo just west and north of Hardwick. Xcel Energy had recently committed to purchase the energy from the Prairie Rose Wind Project and activity and investment on the project and in the area really began to speed up. The men were scouting the area and said ideally they would like to locate in a small community so they don't have to compete with heavy traffic, school zones and so forth with the large equipment and parts being shipped to them. It was important to have access to a main highway or road for the weight of their equipment. They promised to be community friendly to the community they chose to locate in permanently. **The promise of 8-16 jobs and new industry was exciting** to city officials.

Hardwick city officials got busy. We bought the closed gas station pumps and solicited oil companies in the area to reopen it. That was a vital piece of the wind tower construction; constructions workers needed a gas station. The only company that would even consider coming to our community was a small business owned by one man, Greg Popkes. The larger co-ops and companies in the area didn't want to take the financial risk. Mr. Popkes knows first-hand the value and importance of small rural towns. Hardwick is leasing the gas station to Mr. Popkes for \$50/month in hopes we can provide him enough business to remain open for years to come. This is important to our elderly population.

Individuals that own the grocery store in a neighboring community are interested in re-opening the Hardwick grocery store. Therefore the City [bought the grocery store](#) building and volunteers are renovating it to lease with the option to buy to these individuals. We plan to have a grocery store within the next couple months. Currently Enel is renting the majority of the building for their temporary office and storage space.

THE POST OFFICE IS STILL OPEN.

The Green Lantern had a prosperous summer from the construction workers and their families, the meetings and seminars sponsored by Enel, Geronimo and Mortenson Construction. The owners reinvested their profits into their business and updated the much needed café. [The Green Lantern is no longer circling the drain.](#)

Enel is in the process of purchasing a rundown parcel on the west edge of Hardwick. The property had been in foreclosure. Enel now plans to build their O & M facility on this land. [The dilapidated structures are gone](#) which is already a great improvement. We are anxious to have Enel's new facility on the edge of town.

Almost all of the houses that were for sale two years ago have sold. Hardwick has made a community campground behind the park. It was full most of the summer. Our church's congregation has grown.

There is a renewed sense of pride in Hardwick. [Geronimo and Enel's promise of helping our community has much exceeded what we could have ever expected.](#) Geronimo has established a community fund in which they plan to reinvest up to \$40K annually back into the community.

Xcel Energy's commitment to buy energy resources within Minnesota enabled Geronimo and Enel to build this project and help revitalize our community.

I want you to understand that not only are we on our way to being a viable small city again, we have preserved a way of life. Approximately twelve children live in my neighborhood. Today their ages range from 8 to 19. These kids are a family of their own because we live close they have to get along and don't have too many other friend options. There isn't much idle time in the neighborhood. With mowing every elderly person's lawn in Hardwick or shoveling their snow, there isn't much time for video games and trouble. These opportunities provide great work ethics, intergenerational skills and a sense of community. When our schools are looking to install metal detectors and employ on site police officers, I think we need to get back to the basics and restore some of the home town rural values.

I don't have to tell you about the benefits of wind energy, their numbers speak for themselves. After you hear the statistics of what wind energy does for our environment, how can you dispute the benefits and funding? We are not taking anything out of the earth we can't put back, there are no pollutants and there will be no oil spills killing fish and wild life to name a few. Those statistics aside, [I want you to know what a boost to our economy and a blessing Geronimo & Enel have been.](#) You can't measure what we have experienced in Hardwick, Minnesota.

They did much more than build wind towers in our community.

Tammy J. Johnson, Hardwick City Clerk

GERONIMO ENERGY

Geronimo Energy is a full-service renewable energy company headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Geronimo has developed over 1,600 megawatts of wind and solar projects that are either operational or currently under construction throughout the United States. Geronimo has a multi-gigawatt development pipeline of wind and solar projects in various stages of development throughout the United States. Geronimo provides custom solutions for utilities and corporations looking to harness renewable energy for business growth. With deep roots in agriculture, Geronimo prides itself on developing wind farms that are farmer-friendly, community-driven, and beneficial for rural communities.

