



Village of Merrillan Hosts Congressman Derrick Van Orden for Tour of Electric Utility Facilities

Merrillan, WI - The Village of Merrillan recently had the pleasure of hosting Congressman Derrick Van Orden and his staff on Friday, March 14th, 2025, for a tour of the Merrillan Electric Utility's facilities. The visit included a thorough examination of the diesel generator and substation, as well as a firsthand look at the hydro-electric dam at Lower Lake. On behalf of the Village of Merrillan, we would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to Congressman Van Orden for taking the time to visit our community and learn about the inner workings of our electric utility. His interest in our operations and commitment to understanding the unique challenges faced by rural communities like ours is truly appreciated. We value the opportunity to showcase our efforts to provide reliable and affordable energy to our residents and look forward to continuing to work with Congressman Van Orden and his office to address the needs of our community.



The Village of Merrillan is proud to have a strong partnership with our federal representatives and is grateful for their support in our endeavors to maintain and improve our critical infrastructure. This partnership is particularly important as we navigate the complexities of managing our hydro-electric dam. In a related matter, the Village has been addressing the challenge of repairing the hydro-electric dam's debris barrier, which collapsed in January 2024.

Since then, the dam has been shut down, and the Village has been working to conduct a comprehensive inspection to determine the best course of action for repairs. Despite facing challenges in securing the necessary personnel for the inspection, the Village is nearing a solution and looks forward to moving forward with the repair process, albeit with an eye on the significant costs associated with the inspection and subsequent repairs.



Plant Operator Mike Garbers discusses the challenges of upkeep and maintenance of the aging system.

The Village of Merrilan would also like to extend its appreciation to County Board Representative Bill Laurent for his ongoing support and collaboration. His dedication to our community and his efforts to promote the interests of rural municipalities like ours are invaluable to our success.

The Village of Merrilan Electric Utility: A Century of Progress and Community Service

For over 100 years, the Merrilan Electric Utility has been a cornerstone of the community, providing reliable and affordable electricity to its residents. The journey began in 1902 with the installation of a hydroelectric plant on a wooden dam, marking the transition from oil streetlights to electric arc streetlights. Although the initial year was met with a setback when the wooden dam was flooded, resulting in a temporary interruption of service, the Village persevered and later modernized the hydro plant with a concrete dam. Today, this hydroelectric facility remains in operation, generating approximately 252,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity annually, which is sold to Dairyland Power. Furthermore, the utility's certified renewable resource credits from the hydro plant enable Dairyland Power to meet its scheduled requirements for renewable energy generation. Notably, the hydro plant produces enough power to support 35 to 40 homes each year.

In 1904, the Village constructed a diesel generating power plant, initially powered by coal, to supplement the hydroelectric facility. An interesting footnote in history reveals that, in 1916, additional power was generated on Tuesdays and Thursdays to accommodate the ironing needs of the Village. Over the years, the diesel plant has undergone significant upgrades, including a \$100,000 switchgear upgrade in 2002. The current diesel generating capacity of over 800 kWh remains sufficient to meet the Village's needs during outages, maintenance, or periods of high demand that exceed Dairyland Power's capacity.

As of today, the Merrilan Electric Utility serves 417 residential customers, including 96 commercial accounts, generating annual revenue of \$377,000 and incurring expenses of approximately \$343,000. The Village has a long-standing wholesale power agreement with Dairyland Power, which has been instrumental in providing reliable and affordable electricity to the community. In response to the evolving power industry landscape, the Village is also an active member of the Upper Midwest Municipal Energy Group (UMMEG), a collective effort to maintain low rates and reliable power delivery through various contracts, including conventional power generation, solar, wind, and other emerging sources. Village President Chris Wruck and Public Works Operator Griffin Abbott represent the Village on the UMMEG Board, ensuring that the community's interests are represented.

Despite the Village's excellent relationship with Dairyland Power, the rising costs of power generation, transmission, and capacity are expected to impact rates in the coming years. Government regulations, transportation costs, and capacity constraints are among the factors contributing to these increases. To mitigate these effects, the UMMEG and the Village Board are continually monitoring industry developments and exploring options to maintain the lowest possible costs for residents.

In 2024 the Village applied for and was awarded a Public Service Commission grant that will develop a plan to engineer upgrades to our electric grid. This includes the possibility of upgrading from 2400 volts to 7200 volts, undergrounding high-risk areas, new lines, transformers, power poles, and other infrastructure upgrades. We are also exploring the possibility of a solar installation. Once the engineering is completed the Village will explore funding opportunities to implement the upgrades.

The Village Board takes great pride in the dedication and hard work of the Public Works Crew, who have consistently delivered electricity at a lower cost than any other provider in the area. This commitment to providing exceptional service and value to the community has been a hallmark of the Merrilan Electric Utility for over a century.

Media Contact:

Village President Chris Wruck
608-487-3505
cwruck@merrillanwi.gov