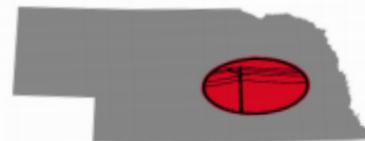


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# POLK COUNTY RURAL PUBLIC POWER DISTRICT

‘The Livewire’

“Committed to enhancing the lives of our customers by providing safe, reliable and economical energy through excellence in customer service and innovation”



February 2022

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## Fowler Takes Helm of PCRPPD

By Wade Rahm

Over a year ago, Phil Burke announced to the PCRPPD Board of Directors his intention to retire in April of 2022. With the announcement, the Board of Directors was tasked with finding a suitable and qualified candidate to take over the General Manager duties. Through the next couple of board meetings, the board evaluated their options to find the replacement. During these discussions, it was apparent that a well-qualified person was on staff. The Directors interviewed Barb Fowler, and she was offered the position of General Manager starting on 1/1/2022 and would serve as Assistant General Manager until that time. Her time spent as Assistant General Manager was used to transition the leadership from Burke to Fowler, learn her new duties and role, and find a replacement for the position of Technical Systems Manager.

Vernon Kuhnel, President of the PCRPPD Board of Directors, commented, “I’ve been through this process of replacing the General Manager four times. When interviewing someone new, it is hard to know if they are telling the truth. With Barb coming from in-house, we have a history with her and know her qualifications. We know she is well equipped to do the job. With Barb being General Manager and the employees we already have, the transition should be seamless.”

Barb, a College of St. Mary’s graduate with a BA in Pre-Law/Paralegal degree, has been a familiar face and pillar of PCRPPD for many years, starting with the District in 1997 as a receptionist. Over her years of service with PCRPPD, she has been promoted and taken on different duties such as operations assistant, load control/AMI/SCADA, purchasing, technical systems with IT/OT, enterprise platform, GIS/mapping, and Strategic Plan Coordinator.

During Fowler’s time at PCRPPD, she has also increased her education through training and courses provided at the nationwide and statewide associations. In 2018 she graduated from the Robert I. Kabat Management Internship Program (MIP), a rigorous and comprehensive, six-week program broken into three blended learning units that provide an in-depth analysis of the functions and processes of electric district management. Barb is also part of the 2019 class for Leadership Nebraska, facilitated by the Nebraska State Chamber. Additionally, Fowler has served on multiple advisory boards at a state and national level and has testified to the State Legislature regarding Public Power issues.

Barb and her husband Scott reside in the rural Clarks area. Together they own Burg Auto in Stromsburg, where she also takes care of the bookkeeping and accounting. They have two sons,



**Barb Fowler**

Hayden and Joe. Joe and his wife Jennie, have Barb’s one grandchild, Frannie.

Fowler has been very active in the Stromsburg community in the past with serving Secretary/Treasurer Chamber of Commerce, Cross County Booster Club, Stromsburg Home Builders, Girls On the Run, TeamMates, Burg Ball Association, Running Club, Boy Scouts, EMT, St Vincent’s Parish Trustee, Altar Society Officer, and Stromsburg Development Corporation.

In talking with Fowler about what her goals were for PCRPPD she commented, “The team goal remains true to our mission, we are here to serve our customer-owners. My goals are to provide the resources and tools for the team to safely accomplish that.”

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# Watt Matters

By Barb Fowler - General Manager

*\*Note\* - Watt Matters will be a periodic column written by the General Manager in future publications covering different topics related to PCRPPD*

The team matters. I am writing this Thursday, December 16th. Yesterday was the freak warm and humid weather with devastating tornado and winds. Our PCRPPD team was up until 3:00 AM this morning, working in the not-so-warm, yet still very windy darkness, to ensure power was restored to our customers. Then, they returned to work at 7:00 AM. Every office teammate stayed late last night answering customer calls and questions, making return call backs, lining up material, delivering food to the linemen and waiting for their safe return home. Not a single one was asked to stay, but they all wanted to help our customers and each other.

Looking at all their sleepy, puffy eyes this morning in the crew room, I could

not be prouder of our PCRPPD team. All can count their morning hours of sleep on one hand, but they're back up and at it continuing to repair damage from yesterday's storm in order to ensure our system reliability continues. I'm a little teary-eyed writing this (could be my own single hand count) but we **Simply. Have. The. Best. Team.** and you need to know how much they are committed to serving you any time of the day and in any kind of weather.

I know paying the electric bill is not the monthly task you look forward to the most. But with that payment, please know you are the recipient of a commitment that only comes from people who care deeply about what they do and why they do it. When

everyone is united in purpose, a beneficial purpose that serves not only the mission of the District but also our communities, you have a great team. And this great team is here to serve you.



**Braving the horrible winds and bone-chilling temperatures, the crews worked to make repairs after the December 15th storm, which included two confirmed tornados in our District, rain, hail, 80+ MPH winds, and snow.**



**During this weather event, approximately 685 customers lost power, 26 poles were broken. All but two customers were restored power by 2:30am on 12/16/2022. An estimated total of damage was \$83,000. We have applied through NEMA for reimbursement.**



# Incredible Energy Claims

By: Cory Fuehrer - NPPD Energy Efficiency Program Manager

The Oxford English Dictionary phrase, if it's "too good to be true" was first written in 1580. More than 500 years later, this expression seems to apply to every facet of modern times; powering our daily lives is no exception.

After learning of an incredible energy-saving or producing equipment or gadget, customers have often turned to their local public power utility as a trusted source for an unbiased opinion. Sadly, many manufacturer claims regarding product capabilities or efficiencies are grossly overstated. Furthermore, most customers don't have the personal knowledge or experience to sort through the facts and fallacies by themselves. Below are a few examples utility colleagues have recently seen.

## The Black Box

Manufacturers of these small devices claim you simply plug their unit into an electrical outlet to potentially save hundreds to thousands of dollars per year. They often lead their sales pitch by saying, "This is the device your power company doesn't want you to know about." They might provide a lengthy explanation about how after a few weeks, their gadget learns how to optimize your appliance's electricity use that will save an extraordinary percentage of energy. While the theory behind their device often yields savings for industrial customers with large motor loads, residential customers seldom see any difference on their electric bill.

## Go Solar

With claims like "The International Energy Agency declares solar power is the "cheapest electricity in history," homeowners are thrilled with the prospects of not only eliminating their electric bill but making an income from the extra energy produced. Usually, a company's solar consultant

schedules a time to meet with homeowners to individually "right-size" a system while discussing current incentives and tax credits, potential savings, decreasing equipment costs, and sustainability, as well as future energy costs and increasing property values. At the same time, they may not elaborate on electric utility interconnection, maintenance, unforeseen installation costs, battery storage requirements and more. Though most sales representatives recognize their company's future relies on customers being satisfied with the installation, they also know their personal income is based on the customer saying "Yes". Consequently, some claims have been misrepresented leading to consumer disappointment.

## Windows

Common claims made by less-honorable window sales reps may include, "Their window saves up to 50% in energy." Does that mean 50% of your home's total energy costs? No. They are usually referring to a home's heating and cooling losses through windows alone. Several studies have indicated that approximately 10 to 12% of a home's total heating and cooling loss is through windows. When considering all losses, this calculates to an overall energy savings of 5% to 6%. Considering the cost of installing each window can range from several hundred dollars to well over \$1,000, the payback from savings extends out many years.

## Space Heaters

Imagine saving "50% or more on home heating costs" using "the most-efficient space heater ever made". Such declarations are used to justify a 1,500-watt space heater that may cost several hundred dollars or more. Regrettably, some customers don't understand the draconian measures they must take to achieve that level of

savings such as lowering their whole home thermostat setting by 15°F or more and isolating in one room for the heating season. To add insult to injury, they are further perturbed after discovering other 1,500-watt space heaters costing as little as \$20 produce the exact amount of heat just as efficiently as their expensive one.

Numerous other claims have been made by manufacturers of insulations/heat barriers, air conditioner refrigerant additives and whole house fans to name a few. While most energy efficiency and energy producing products are fairly represented in the market, some are just too good to be true.

If you're looking at a significant investment, thoroughly research the promoting company through the Better Business Bureau and the Federal Trade Commission. The Department of Energy through Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory has developed a web-based evaluation tool to help consumers evaluate window energy savings. And the Environmental Protection Agency through the National Renewable Energy Laboratory offers a photovoltaic energy system evaluator to assist with evaluating solar projects.

As always, know PCRPPD will help to provide unbiased, objective information regarding any energy efficiency or energy producing products you are considering. In partnership with Nebraska Public Power District, they want to help you make the most of the energy needed in daily life including how energy is used and can be saved. For additional ways you can become more EnergyWiseSM, visit with your PCRPPD and go to [www.nppd.com](http://www.nppd.com) or [www.pcrppd.com](http://www.pcrppd.com).

# Fowler (Continued from page 1)

Fowler continued, “Unique issues challenge our industry today like finding the right balance between environmental stewardship and meeting customer expectations of 24/7/365 power. And realizing it will take patience, innovation, and compromise to strike the right balance of solutions.” She also remarked, “Nebraska has uniquely chosen to put Nebraskan’s energy needs and cost control in the hand of its residents. All of us are owners of this opportunity and responsibility and we need to do our part to ensure our voice is what is heard when decisions are made. This can only happen by becoming interested, involved and active in our public power.” Fowler finished with, “Please stop in and see us. We want to hear from you. We are here for you and because of you. We want you to know we value that.”

Please join us in welcoming Barb to her new role at PCRPPD!



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