

Tveitbakk retires from NMPA

Clearbrook, Minn., native is only second full-time GM at the organization

Sitting across from two Bond Insurance Underwriters donning slick-looking suits, Northern Municipal Power Agency General Manager Darryl Tveitbakk was first in line for the presentations to the men.

Meeting at a boat table on the 25th floor of a meeting room gave Tveitbakk a good window view of New York Harbor, the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

Tveitbakk, NMPA staff and Minnkota Power Cooperative staff were meeting with representatives from Ambac Assurance Corp., a municipal bond insurance company. Tveitbakk and others were presenting information to the corporation a day after delivering similar presentations to ratings agencies in the Big Apple.

Tveitbakk, who grew up on a dairy farm near Clearbrook, Minn., found his thoughts drifting after his part of the presentation concluded. He couldn't help it, apparently mesmerized by the view.

"I thought what the hell is a dairy farmer's kid from Clearbrook doing here?" he said. "It was way beyond where I thought I'd be."

A decade later, Tveitbakk smiled and laughed as he reflected on the anecdote just weeks before his retirement after more than 23 years with NMPA — the energy provider for 12 municipal utilities in eastern North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota. Minnkota is operating agent for NMPA.

Only the second full-time general manager in history, Tveitbakk retired Nov. 5 from Thief River Falls, Minn.-based NMPA.

"Having the opportunity to work on some of the bonding things we've done over the years, the financial things we've done over the years, has been fun," Tveitbakk said. "Even though I at first felt this was way out of my league, you learn fast. I think doing those things was a major responsibility but was also a highlight."

Dalene Monsebroten, the finance manager at NMPA, said Tveitbakk was the right person for the job.

"He's a huge advocate of public power," she said, "and he's very knowledgeable on the technical side of things. He's great at communicating with the governmental side, legislative and constituents. He's very well-rounded."

The well-roundedness came through schooling a

Tveitbakk went to school at the old AVTI (now Northland Community and Technical College) after spending a couple of years at the University of Minnesota. He earned degrees in audio communications and industrial electronics.

That allowed him to land a job at the city of Thief River Falls as a technician in the utility department. He spent 17 years with the city before taking a position at Northland as a professor of electronics. After being laid off, he found himself without a job in 1993.

So he went to Minnkota and asked the vice president of marketing and communications if he had any job openings. A business acquaintance of the manager, Tveitbakk was eventually hired to do a study on NMPA for the cooperative. He must have done a good job, as NMPA hired him as director of customer service in 1995.

He was promoted to general manager in 1999.

Tveitbakk says he feels good about finishing his career in the same county in which his grandfather homesteaded after immigrating from Norway in the early 1900s. On the wall of Tveitbakk's NMPA office was a letter from President Woodrow Wilson, approving his grandfather's homestead.

Next to the letter was a map of where the farm was located on the east end of Pennington County. Tveitbakk likes to uncover the history of everything in his path and the path of his ancestors. He has an early 1900s picture of the location of the condo he owns just fourth blocks from Target Field in the Warehouse District of downtown Minneapolis.

In addition to the condo, Tveitbakk and wife Deborah will spend time at their cabin in the woods near Clearbrook. Their three boys and three granddaughters live in the Twin Cities area.

NMPA can thank Deborah for keeping her husband in the Thief River Falls area.

"In college, during my second year, I met this little girl from Red lake Falls. That's really why I stayed here. I really never intended to stay here at all. That was really the driver of taking the job with the city, even though it paid less than another offer I received on the same day, because she was not interested in moving out of here."

Tveitbakk hopes to continue to be a Pennington County commissioner and a cantor in his church, so he plans to remain in Thief River Falls. In his late 60s, though, he thought it was time to move into another chapter of life.

"I want to control my time," he said. "I don't want somebody else controlling my time. I enjoyed working here. I will miss it. But I'm going to be 69 years old. . . . Every day I'm here is one day I'm not retired."