

“This is a remarkable place ...”

Leaders, politicians, friends and family gather for the Dry Fork Station dedication

By Daryl Hill and Tracie Bettenhausen

The dedication ceremony for Wyoming’s newest coal-based power plant was held Aug. 11 at the \$1.35-billion Dry Fork Station six miles north of Gillette.

More than 1,100 people were in attendance for a program that featured Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead. He said the Dry Fork Station is a story of perseverance. “There were amazing hurdles that had to be overcome to get the plant built,” he said. “Coal is part of our past, present and future.”

Mead said the Dry Fork Station provides low-cost electricity that helps maintain a quality of life. “Coal from Wyoming has fueled American dreams. As we think about this, it’s grand to see a power plant up and running in the midst of other coal plants across the country being shut down,” he said. “We hope this is a sign of many more to come. I have confidence in the ability of coal to produce low-cost electricity. It’s not a question of need, but a question of desire. We want coal to produce low-cost electricity.”

U.S. Sen. John Barrasso said a project like Dry Fork takes a lot of vision to get completed. “It takes passion, persistence and patience,” he said. “We need to protect the resources of this state. Coal is the most available, reliable and affordable energy resource this country has. The Wyoming delegation is committed to making sure coal remains a part of our energy future.”

U.S. Rep. Cynthia Lummis said every politician needs to see the energy the people gathered at the celebration have given to complete this project. “It’s about the energy and power of the human spirit shown by this power plant,” she said. “Electricity from this plant will be used by people all over the region. Electricity from coal makes it possible for us to achieve our dreams.”

Ron Harper, Basin Electric CEO and general manager, said more than \$336 million has been invested for environmental controls, making the plant one of the cleanest in the country. “The emissions limits for this plant were established by the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). They did their job well,” he said. “Issuing a permit for a plant like this is a monumental undertaking. Staff from Wyoming DEQ reviewed hundreds of documents, attended hearings, and spent countless hours analyzing technical data regarding the environmental controls for this power plant. Wyoming has some of the strictest environmental rules in the country, and protection of the environment is a fundamental

commitment; it’s an integral part of who we are at Basin Electric.”

Construction on the Dry Fork Station began in 2007, more than three years after the plant was announced. The work force peaked at about 1,300 in 2009.

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The plant is owned by Basin Electric (92.9 percent), and the Wyoming Municipal Power Agency, Lusk, WY (7.1 percent).

Cliff Gjellstad, president of Basin Electric’s board of directors, said the dedication ceremony is a significant birthday present for the cooperative. “It (the dedication) really wasn’t planned to coincide with our 50th birthday, but it sure is a fitting tribute to who we are and what we do,” he said. “The vision of our founders was to be a supplemental power supplier over and above what our members were getting from the hydro facilities along the Missouri River. We didn’t build this power plant because we were looking for something to do. It was built to meet a growing need of our 135 member systems in nine states. Since we were formed in 1961, the need for more electricity has been growing.”

Mike Easley, CEO of Powder River Energy Corporation, a Class A member cooperative of Basin Electric, said humility, integrity and thoughtfulness are three aspects of the Dry



More than 1,100 people helped Basin Electric and the Wyoming Municipal Power Agency celebrate the new plant during the dedication ceremony Aug. 11.

Fork project. These are also the values of the cooperative movement. “The cooperative movement is one of the most influential in the nation’s history. The customers are the bosses of every cooperative we have. It’s about neighbor helping neighbor,” he said. “The energy from this power plant is not only electricity but human energy to keep it going.”

Steve Hughes, chairman of the Campbell County Commission, said the landscape has changed significantly since the groundbreaking ceremony in 2007. “The conversion of our vast coal resources is a solid investment in the future of Campbell County and the state of Wyoming,” he said. “We’re proud to call you neighbors.”

Tom Murphy, mayor of Gillette, said two of the state’s biggest industries – tourism and energy development – can live side-by-side. “This plant provides jobs for hard-working Americans. Producing electricity takes hard work, and coal helps make this country great. The last thing this country needs is expensive electricity.”

Murphy said it’s nice to see a plant that is “made in America.”

Dave Freudenthal, former Wyoming governor, was a speaker at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Dry Fork Station. At that October 2007 event, he said the growth of the American economy and the growth of the economy in the region are linked to reliable and available supplies of electricity. He continued with that theme. “When Dry Fork was announced, we knew that developing coal was under attack, and there were even thoughts that it would be the last coal plant built in the country. I hope it’s not. It took perseverance by many dedicated men and women to complete this project. They deserve a lot of credit. Basin Electric did it right.

“We in this state have nothing to be ashamed of. We should be proud. This is a remarkable place,” Freudenthal said.

Watch a video from the dedication:
<http://bit.ly/DFSDedication>.



Pilot Dave Champion and his team of volunteers hold the balloon steady as guests arrive. This was one of about 20 events a year that Champion attends with the balloon, all on his personal time.

Balloon flight celebrates Dry Fork

The skies over Gillette, WY, were especially colorful Aug. 10. The Touchstone Energy® balloon took to the air twice in honor of the next day’s dedication of the Dry Fork Station north of town. Basin Electric is a Touchstone Energy regional partner.

At sunrise, the balloon drifted over the city and toward the power plant. Pilot Dave Champion safely landed the balloon in the best possible spot – the parking lot at Basin Electric’s Transmission System Maintenance shop next door to the plant. The day was capped off with a sunset flight as Champion, his wife and chase vehicle commander, Dij, and their volunteer crew again launched the balloon, this time carrying Basin Electric President Cliff Gjellstad and Barb Ireland, wife of Vice President Roy Ireland. The fine weather held out for another day as the balloon was tethered in front of the Dry Fork Station during the dedication ceremony.

Volunteers from the Dry Fork Station who helped with both launches and the tether were Rhonda Chapman, Jaime Riddle, Herb Porter, Garth Virkula and Mike Williamsen. Champion, the balloon pilot, is CEO of Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative in Paxton, IL. His cooperative is a customer of Basin Electric’s Security and Response Services.

See the balloon in flight: <http://bit.ly/TouchstoneBalloon>.