

Serri

joins the cooperative
family, continues
Basin Electric
mission

By Mary Klecker-Green



“We’re keeping the lights on.”

That was Andrew M. Serri’s response when asked how Basin Electric is addressing the many challenges facing the utility industry.

Serri became Basin Electric’s fourth CEO and general manager in late November. Serri’s down-to-earth nature and dedication to the fundamentals are clear.

“We are one of the constants in a sea of change,” he says. “When you are trying to find your way, you don’t have to wonder about whether the light switch is going to work. You know it will. That’s our job, and we do it very well. We know how to look to the future and find our way.”

While Serri is quick to say he cannot predict the future, he believes that if Basin Electric holds true to its mission, the cooperative is well-positioned for a future that includes much uncertainty.

“Our decision-making process is not done in a vacuum,” Serri says. “We get continuous input from our members. We are facing a tremendous amount of uncertainty – both regulatory and in terms of load growth. What kind of load growth will we continue to see and from what type of loads? What role will efficiency and conservation play? There is an array of variables that factor into this, from electric vehicles to evolving technologies to changing demand.”

Serri doesn’t seem daunted.

“To say our entire country – from an energy perspective – is in a state of flux would be an understatement. It’d be a lot easier if it were more of a steady state, but I’ve been in the industry 30 years, and it never has been.”

Serri says Basin Electric is facing a series of unique challenges.

“We are seeing significant load growth in the Bakken Formation in northwestern North Dakota, expanding into Montana,” he says. “What happens if this growth continues at the rapid pace we’re seeing now? With growth come investments in infrastructure – both from generation and transmission perspectives. Is this a boom? Will we see a boom and a bust? Or, will we see a boom that will level out and steadily grow? These are the questions we will

address as we face the truly unique situation in the Bakken. It is only one of the challenges Basin Electric will address.”

Serri says Basin Electric’s challenges are not independent of each other. Rather, they are layered.

“These challenges are not exclusive; layering on top of the Bakken situation is the question of how we move forward in relation to organized markets,” Serri says. “The ability to operate in an organized market and have the ability for reserve sharing and interconnections to other service territories can potentially add strength to our network. However, it can cause seams and congestion issues as well. We are planning, studying and evaluating reams of data before a decision can be made.”

Adding a third layer to these questions is the mounting pressure from the Environmental Protection Agency and the resulting uncertainty, Serri says. “The regulations are ever increasing. The pressure is on coal. Basin Electric has made great strides in diversifying its energy portfolio. We must look for the best opportunities to address the EPA, not only from a diversification standpoint, but from a cost perspective as well.”

While Serri says Basin Electric has a solid record in meeting challenges and serving the membership, he believes the people of the organization are the foundation

for a solid future. “The most valuable part of this organization is the people. The people here – both at Basin Electric and in the community – are just tremendous. We need to capture the intellectual capital of our people before it walks out the door to retirement,” he says. “Aging work force, especially those skilled in trades, is a concern. Our employees are responsible for our past 50 years and will be for the next.”

During one of Serri’s first weeks on the job, he attended the funeral of longtime Basin Electric employee, Kenneth Osberg, who died unexpectedly

Dec. 15. “No one can predict this kind of tragedy. On my way to the Laramie River Station, I wasn’t exactly sure how to get there, but I saw the stack stretch into the sky, and I let that guide me. I met many of the employees who operate that plant 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They

were clearly grieving. It struck me that not only am I now a part of a family that works tirelessly to bring one constant in peoples’ lives – electricity – but also part of a cooperative family that looks out for each other. I appreciate the cooperative value system; when someone shakes your hand and says, ‘You got a deal,’ that means you got a deal. What a great community to work with. I’m glad to be here.”



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*Andrew Serri
Basin Electric*



About Andrew M. Serri

Prior to Basin Electric, Serri was with Ameren Corporation in St. Louis, MO, for 11 years. In 2005, he became president and chief executive officer of Ameren Energy Marketing. Prior to his tenure with Ameren Corporation, he was employed with Progress Energy (formerly Carolina Power & Light) in Raleigh, NC. Before that he was employed with American Electric Power in Columbus, OH, for 18 years.

Throughout his career, Serri has worked closely with cooperatives. “In my various roles at Ameren, Progress Energy and AEP, my biggest customer base was cooperatives,” he says. “I have worked within the

cooperative network in a variety of capacities, ranging from power supply and sales to consulting services. I really got to know the cooperative family well, and I’ve received many congratulatory calls from former cooperative contacts welcoming me into the family. It has really made me feel welcome.”

Serri was raised in Canton, OH, and is a graduate of Ohio State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural (Environmental) Engineering. He also holds a Master of Business Administration degree from Franklin University in Columbus, OH. Serri and his wife, Becky, have one son, Gabriel, 9.