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MAQUOKETA

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Maquoketa Sentinel-Press

NATIONAL FFA WEEK

Feb 21-28, 2009

STEP UP STAND OUT

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National FFA Week celebrated

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Our public notices are also published on the web at:

http://www.publicnoticeads.com/IA/search/searchnotice.asp

Youth hear from Miss Iowa about making choices



MSP photo by Kelly Gerlach

**Royalty visited** Maquoketa Middle School Feb. 10. Miss Iowa 2008 Olivia Myers visited and spoke with students about the consequences of their actions, the choices they make. “She talked about being yourself and how certain things and people will affect your life,” said Paytone Tracy. “She also explained that hanging with the wrong social group could change your life and not always for the better. She inspired us in many ways and is a great mentor. We were very lucky to have her come and visit at the middle school.” Shown are Paytone Tracy, Miss Iowa 2008 Olivia Myers, Aubrey Taylor and Alyssa Root.

MMEU responds to complaints

By DOUGLAS MELVOLD

The Maquoketa Municipal Electric Utility Board of Trustees this week heard complaints from several Maquoketa business people who said the newly-enacted rate increase was more than expected.

Approximately 25 people attended the board’s monthly meeting Tuesday afternoon, Feb. 17.

The complaints were voiced after the first bills were sent out after a rate increase took effect Jan. 1.

The utility also has switched its wholesale power provider, signing a 30-year contract with Wisconsin Public Power Inc. of Sun Prairie, Wis.

While the utility increased rates that it said would amount in the range of 20 to 25 percent for most residential and commercial customers, the utility has received complaints from many customers who said their January bills were far greater than the expected increases.

Mark Onken of Eu-Tec Nutrition gave utility board members a chart he compiled that compared Maquoketa’s rates with those of other area communities and regions.

The chart showed that MMEU’s power cost of 12.43 cents per kilowatt hour is higher than Cascade’s cost of 8.9 cents, Bellevue’s 9.3 cents, Maquoketa Valley Rural Electric Cooperative’s 9.6 cents and Alliant Energy’s 8.5 cents.

He said Eu-Tec’s electric rates increased 31 percent from December to January. He listed several other Maquoketa industries and businesses that rose from 29 percent to 34 percent.

Those charges include the purchased-power adjustment, an add-on charge that varies from month to month depending on the prevailing cost of fuel.

In addition to what he said is the higher cost of wholesale electricity, Onken said MMEU is

paying higher overhead costs.

He said Maquoketa’s overhead cost amounts to 5 cents per kilowatt-hour, above the 2.9 cents for Cascade, 3.3 cents for Bellevue and 3.1 cents for Alliant Energy customers.

“We are here to vigorously protest this wholesale increase,” Onken told the board.

He said the notice of the rate increase that the utility sent out in November said the rate hike would amount to 20 to 25 percent.

“But we have found it to be around 30 percent for a lot of (customers),” he said.

He said he wished that the utility had kept its commercial customers better informed as to the rate increase and “a little more in the loop.

“Is everything being done to be as efficient as possible?” he asked.

He said if the city’s electric rates aren’t competitive with other communities, “that places businesses like us at a disadvantage.”

Bob Gavin, MMEU board chairman, said costs are rising for other utilities as well. He noted that Bellevue is enacting a rate increase.

He also said electric bills for residences may be higher in January because of the timing of the Christmas holiday and the subzero cold that was experienced during January.

He noted that such appliances as space heaters consume large amounts of electricity.

He also said that the utility board spent much time studying its options when it dropped its affiliation with Resale Power Group of Iowa, the wholesale group with which the utility had been affiliated almost since it was formed as a separate entity in 1984.

Tom Gilmore of T&J Manufacturing said the rate increase has been “pretty tough to swallow.”

He asked why the utility pledged a \$300,000 donation to the Maquoketa Area Family YMCA

facility at a time it enacted a steep rate increase.

Gavin said the donation was taken from the utility’s budget for economic development. He noted that the YMCA has added jobs and otherwise contributes to the city’s economy.

He said the utility’s contribution is being paid over several years, with two years remaining.

“A much smaller donation would have been in line,” Gilmore said.

Dwight Zeck of Madison, Wis., part owner and manager of the River Village apartments, said the bill for the 48-unit River Village I complex rose from \$3,400 a month to \$5,700 a month.

The company pays the electric bill, which is included in the rent.

He said his company could pay only part of the bill now and is having to defer the balance.

Electricity for some of the apartments ran as high as \$190, he said.

“At that rate we can’t afford to do it much longer,” he said.

He said electricity costs in Evansdale, where his company operates a 48-unit complex the same size as River Village II, is four times less than the Maquoketa facility.

He suggested that the city consider bringing in a publicly-owned utility “and stop doing what we are doing.”

Gavin said the MMEU board had the options of staying with the Resale Power Group of Iowa and “going elsewhere.”

He defended the board’s decision and said “WPPI is a good match for us.”

He noted that the utility’s contract guarantees future rates. The alternative, he said would have been to take a chance and pay prevailing prices,

■ UTILITIES,  
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