

your **Connexus Connection**

For Connexus Energy Members

Summer 2020 Edition

**More
renewable
energy**

**INVICTUS BREWING
CONQUERS BLAINE**

EV chargers come home

Cool treats for you & your pooch



\$7.6 million back to members

August is Cash Back Month

It pays to be a member of our cooperative. If you are getting Cash Back, a credit will be applied to your August bill. To find out more about how Cash Back works, visit us at connexusenergy.com.



CONTACT US

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*Connexus Energy is an equal opportunity/
affirmative action employer.*

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Mark Ethen, Vice Chair (Blaine)
Gordon Westerlind, Secretary/Treasurer
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Reliable



Affordable



Safe

We are Connexus Energy.

your most powerful membership™



Front cover photo: Drone-eye view of Ramsey Renewable Station.

CEO Sparks

Greg Ridderbusch, President & CEO

“Unprecedented” – A word for the times

These are unprecedented times. How many times have we heard that sentiment expressed in the past few months? Unprecedented is the societal impact of a scary disease and the impact on business as it tries to adapt. Unprecedented, and for many not visible, is the rapid emergence of carbon-free electricity. It’s also a good word to describe what’s going on at Connexus Energy.

Keeping the lights on during COVID-19 requires your cooperative to rapidly morph its operations to keep staff safe and preserve our ability to operate. Amid all the coronavirus news, you may have missed hearing about other exciting changes. We’re adding renewable energy at an unprecedented pace. Renewables are affordable and helping us save on power costs. It started two years ago with our innovative solar plus battery storage projects in Ramsey and Athens Township. We are on a roll and currently planning on adding two additional solar sites in Baldwin and Stanford Townships. We are optimistic that Sunflower I and Sunflower II will be operational by the end of the year. Why the name Sunflower? The panels at both sites move with and track the sun, just like the real flowers.

In an unprecedented move, our main power supplier, Great River Energy (GRE) also took a big step this spring and made the tough decision to shut down Coal Creek Station in North Dakota. This move benefits our members because it will lower our wholesale power costs. For decades, Coal Creek was the main generating source of electricity for Connexus Energy and 27 other cooperatives throughout Minnesota. GRE is phasing out coal resources and focusing on additional wind energy and exploring grid scale battery technology. Their goal is to have 50 percent renewable energy by 2030. Our members already receive electricity that is more than 25 percent renewable. With Connexus’ additional solar projects, I’m confident we’ll get there sooner rather than later.

On a personal note, those of you who I’ve had the privilege to meet know that I’m kind of an “energy geek.” For me, these are exciting, and yes, unprecedented times to be at Connexus Energy. There are so many opportunities out there to make a difference. I firmly believe that we can deliver reliable, affordable, safe, and more renewable electricity to all our members. Continue to stay safe. We’re here for you.



Member Spotlight **Invictus Brewing**

Unconquerable in Blaine

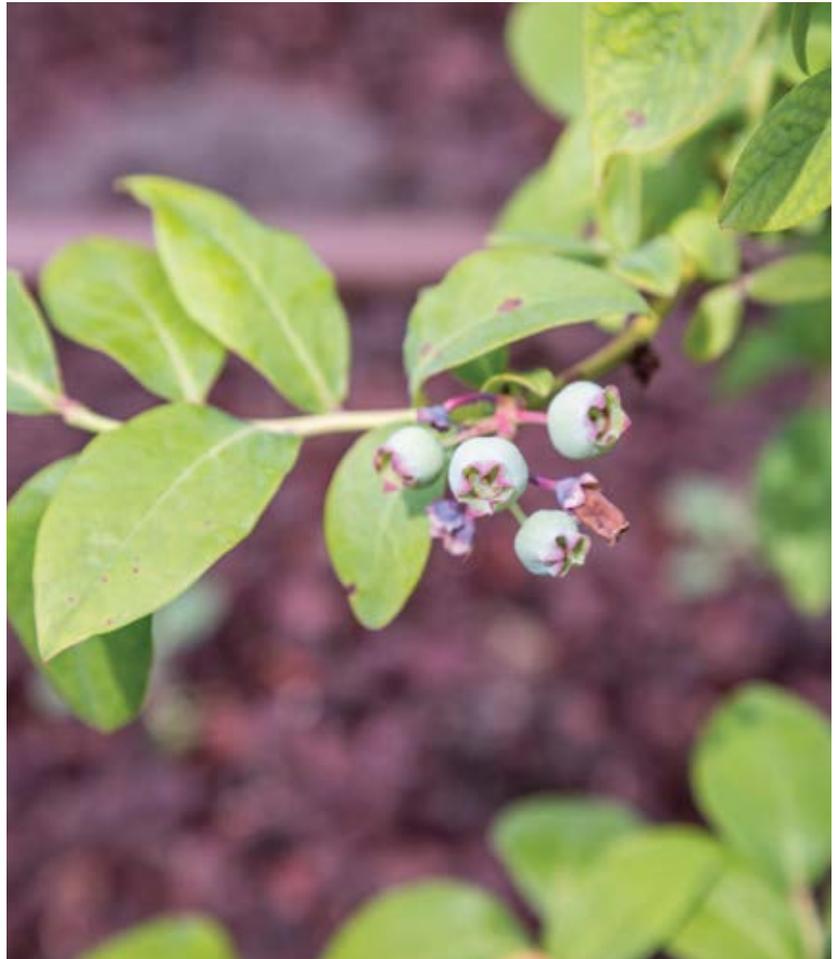
What started out as a hobby with several friends getting together and brewing beer is now one of Blaine's success stories. Previn Solberg is the President of Invictus Brewing. Sam Vilella is one of the investors. The two met at a party and bonded over their shared interest in home brewing and sustainability. Soon, casual conversations about opening a brewery started to take shape and a dream was on its way to becoming a reality. Putting his financial background to good use, Previn started working on a business plan. It wasn't long before Sam, an optometrist, and several other investors decided this was worth the gamble. After all, Blaine did not have a single brewery.

"One of the early criticisms we got was that we were too late into the game. There was too much market saturation," says Previn. Even with about 180 craft breweries in Minnesota, I disagree. The brew industry still has room to grow. Yes, we came later but we benefited from learning from other breweries' mistakes."

It took nearly four years from that initial business plan to when Invictus Brewing finally opened its doors in May 2018. That's because there were so many challenges that needed to be conquered.

One of the biggest challenges was finding a site for the brewery. At first, they looked for a cool, older building to refurbish but soon found that those buildings just didn't exist in Blaine. They would just have to build new. They found their site next to the National Sports Center. All those soccer tournaments, hockey games, and even a nearby golf course to draw in the patrons. It was the perfect place to build. Even with a chosen site, there were still more hurdles to overcome.

When it came time to build, they did what they could to be as sustainable as possible. "Sustainability is the right thing to do. Sustainability goes with craft beer just like community does. It all ties together," says Previn.



Blueberries, strawberries, watermelon, and cucumber from the on-site garden are used in various Invictus beer recipes. Once they get their slushy machine, a beer fruit smoothie will be added to the menu.

They installed high-efficiency appliances, LED lighting, and eco-friendly panels on the roof and walls. The building is solar-ready.

Connexus Energy helped with all the rebates, from chillers, to high energy-efficiency boilers, to the HVAC system.

Invictus is very energy efficient. "In the winter, the heat doesn't really run," adds Previn. Our primary source of heat is the ambient heat from the kitchen equipment and our boiler from the brewing equipment. We didn't insulate the floor intentionally so that in the winter we get radiant heat from the ground and the cooling effect in the summer. It creates natural air conditioning because we have equipment running all the time. But we still have an air conditioner for when it gets really hot."



Six electric vehicle chargers are installed by the front doors. And, while Previn Solberg and Sam Vilella admit they will not be making any money on the chargers, they feel good about giving that energy back to the community.

Looking back, Sam says they were shooting pretty high to start. “We invested a lot into the building and equipment, a lot more than other start-up breweries. When you start, you look at every penny. You don’t know how successful you’re going to be. For us, it was worth it.”

Both men are proud of the fact their friends and neighbors refer to the brewery as a community center. “They don’t say let’s meet at the brewery. It’s always let’s meet at the community center. Kids are welcome here,” says Previn. And, it’s that same community that has helped the business survive during the past five months. “When COVID-19 first hit, people went out of their way to support us,” adds Sam. “I was shocked at how much support we had. It was humbling. The “to-go” business kept us going through the dark times of the pandemic. With the community’s help, we’re going to survive this.”

So what’s next to conquer? “Our long-term ambition is to be a large distributor of Invictus beer. We started distributing a year ago, so we’re on our way,” says Previn. If an infectious, unconquerable spirit means anything, they will succeed.



WHAT’S IN THE NAME?

Sam came up with the name Invictus. “My grandfather would recite the poem to me when I was 21 and in the hospital recovering from a near-fatal boating accident. I always told myself I would name a boat after that poem, but this is better.”

INVICTUS

By William Ernest Henley

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

Electric Vehicles Charge Ahead

While still not prevalent, electric vehicles (EVs) are finding homes in more garages throughout Minnesota. Consumers have their own reasons for buying an EV. Climate change is a big deal to the Stevenson family in Coon Rapids. They want to do their part to help. That's why they installed solar panels on the back of their 1975 house, and that's why they now own an electric vehicle.

Before Kent finally decided to buy his Tesla Model 3, he checked out our website to see what we offered EV owners.

"I was happy to find that I didn't need a fancy Tesla charger to qualify for a rebate. I got the universal charger just in case we buy another EV and it's not a Tesla. I'm also on the off-peak program, so I'm also saving money while charging my EV. Hopefully my little bit helps. And, if I'm being honest, the added bonus is that the Tesla 3 is sexy and fast!"

Take charge of savings

If you've got your eye on a sleek new electric vehicle, we can help. We know a thing or two about electric vehicles (and we're learning more every day), and we know a lot more about how to save you money. We offer:

- » Discounted electric rates for charging your EV
- » \$500 rebate for the installation of your charger
- » \$800 discount for a Level 2 charger when you buy it through our online store*

*Limited quantities available



With a charger in his garage and plenty of charging stations in every state, Kent is always ready to take his EV for a spin around the block or a cross-country road trip.

Do your EV research at connexusenergy.com.



Co-op Cuisine

ICE CREAM SANDWICH CAKE

24 vanilla ice cream sandwiches, unwrapped
2 (8 oz.) containers Cool Whip, thawed
1 (12 oz.) jar hot fudge ice cream topping, warmed
1 (12 oz.) jar caramel ice cream topping
¼ cup chopped peanuts or pecans, or to taste

Arrange a layer of ice cream sandwiches in the bottom of a 9x13-inch pan. Top with a layer of Cool Whip, hot fudge topping, and caramel topping. Repeat layering with remaining ice cream sandwiches, whipped topping, hot fudge and caramel toppings, ending with a top layer of Cool Whip. Sprinkle with nuts.

Cover dish with aluminum foil and freeze overnight or until set.

Your waistline won't thank you, but it is yummy!



DOGGIE DAYS OF SUMMER ICE CREAM

This dog ice cream is delicious and good for your four-legged best buddy.

32 oz. plain yogurt
1 mashed banana
2 tablespoons peanut butter
2 tablespoons honey

Mix all ingredients in blender. Pour into ice cube trays, paper cups, or a Kong toy. Freeze and serve.

Treasure the kisses you're going to get.

SolarWise Honey

Honey from our community solar garden is now available!

\$12

All the proceeds will be donated to Ruff Start Rescue.
Honey is only available for purchase in the Connexus Energy lobby. **Cash transactions only*

Oh Snap!



Our resident bee keeper Greg Groenjes, who also happens to be the manager of our line crews, is keeping his fingers crossed that his hives in our community solar garden produce lots of honey this summer.



Saluting the red, white, and blue.



We're all in this together. Josh McDermott, a distribution designer in our engineering department, sewed a dozen masks for co-workers who needed them.