

BURGHARDT ENCOURAGES NEW CANDIDATES TO RUN AFTER 18 YEARS ON CENTRAL ELECTRIC BOARD

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Since 2004, Bernetta “Bert” Burghardt of Fedora has represented Miner County on the board of directors for Central Electric Cooperative. With her sixth term nearing the end, she decided it’s time for a new face on the board and does not intend to seek reelection.

“I’ll miss it – the people in the office and on the board. I think we have a good culture,” she said.

Burghardt has been part of some major changes since 2004. The cooperative built the new headquarters on Betts Road in 2012 and hired a new general manager, Ken Schlimgen, to fill the shoes of Loren Noess, who retired in 2016. Burghardt also witnessed firsthand the introduction of digital communication technology on the board, in the office and out in the field.

So, what made Burghardt decide to run for a board position? “Somebody reached out and said, ‘I think you should consider running.’” She didn’t share who that individual was, but it seems they were keenly aware of her

capabilities. Burghardt was and still is actively involved with her church, and she served on the board of directors for Sanborn Telephone Cooperative (now Santel Communications). In addition, she worked for the law office in Howard, Mumford Protsch.

She was fortunate to have the support of her employers who allowed her time off to serve on Central Electric’s board. Vince Protsch, who was a veteran attorney for East River Electric Power Cooperative, served as counsel at Mumford Protsch.

Burghardt said 2004 was a rollercoaster year; after she was elected to Central Electric Cooperative’s board, she was diagnosed with cancer. At the same time, the War in Afghanistan called one of the law partners to serve, which led to staff downsizing at the law office. Part-time work was offered, and when the partner’s tour ended, her health restored and she resumed working full-time.

Burghardt hasn’t always lived in Miner County, but it’s always been her home. After attending South Dakota State College in Brookings, she and her husband Dick moved away – first to Chicago and then Minneapolis. Dick attended school to become an electronics technician, but his heart was in agriculture, and they returned home in 1974 allowing him to farm and raise cattle near Fedora.

Dick and Bernetta have three children and four grandchildren. Their oldest son, Steve, lives nearby and works for Dawson Construction of Howard. He is also a farrier, who trims and shoes horse hooves, and he helps Dick on the farm. Steve’s kids are Randy, Derick and Jessica. The Burghardts’ daughter, Jill, is a retired embryologist and lives in Pennsylvania. Neil, their youngest, lives in Brookings with his wife, Bridgit.

They have a son named Mason. Neil works for Daktronics and is also active with the family farming operation.

While Burghardt won’t be attending board meetings anymore, she doesn’t show any signs of slowing down. “I am working four days each week, and I don’t have any immediate plans to retire. I just think it’s time for somebody else to step in and participate as a director,” she said.

Board President Duane Wolbrink of Stickney said Burghardt will be sorely missed. “With her legal background, Bernetta keeps us on track with grammar, policies and bylaws. On top of that, she is a genuine and sincere person. Her perspective and expertise are appreciated.”

Central Electric Cooperative General Manager Ken Schlimgen agrees Burghardt’s presence has been a remarkable asset. He said, “The board and staff have a great deal of respect for Bernetta. Her strong character guides her in making sound decisions that are in the best interest of the cooperative and its members.”

Looking to the future, Burghardt said she hopes rural cooperative members will take ownership and embrace the cooperative model, which centers largely around community. “Come to the meetings. Participate and find out what it means to be a cooperative member.”

We wish Burghardt all the best as she moves on from her director position. She offers this advice for anybody considering running for a board position – “Do it! It’s truly a rewarding experience.”

Meanwhile, Burghardt will help keep the gears turning at Mumford Protsch law office on Main Street in Howard, just like she’s done for more than two decades.



Bernetta Burghardt stands outside Mumford Protsch, LLP on Main Street in Howard.