



Former KPUD General Manager Tom Svendsen and his wife, Debi, are enjoying retirement and spending time with family.

An Unexpected Career at KPUD

KPUD General Manager Tom Svendsen's career highlighted by ingenuity, opportunity

By Caleb Flowers

Tom Svendsen did not plan to be at Klickitat PUD for 35 years. He says it just happened.

Few individuals have invested as much time and energy into the PUD as Tom. He was fresh out of college when he answered an ad for an electrical engineer position that brought him to the area in 1976.

With a degree in electrical engineering from the University of Washington, he left his hometown of Seattle.

He knew this was what he wanted to do.

His grandfather was an engineer for Seattle City Light. From the time he was a child, Tom dreamed of becoming an

engineer.

When he first moved to Goldendale, locals still talked about the last person to get electrified, as Tom puts it, meaning they had just recently gotten electricity.

It was a stark contrast to the bright city lights of Seattle.

"There were no subdivisions back then," Tom says. "The people that lived here wanted to live out of town.

It stayed that way for nearly the next 30 years, but the population steadily increased. Tom watched as the remote, rural area slowly transformed into the town it is today.

New homes and businesses were brought in, and with that came the need for more electricity—and more



Tom celebrates the White Creek Wind I project. He consulted for Klickitat PUD throughout the planning, preparation and construction, above and left.



opportunities for Tom and the PUD.

Tom has been a pioneer of renewable energy, leading the way during this innovative period for the PUD.

He remembers the area serving as a test bed for natural energy sources and housing one of the first test sites for large-scale wind turbines.

The Mod 2 project in 1980 gave Tom a glimpse of future projects that would come, and how the land would continue to be tapped for similar sustainable energy activities.

In the mid-90s, Tom oversaw the reworking of the McNary Dam generator—a project that fused electricity with ecology and propelled the success of both industries.

From the electrical design/build squad to the conservation department, and from operations to generation, Tom has vast experience at Klickitat PUD. At one point, he was the youngest chief engineer in Washington.

Around the time he initially retired in 2009, the PUD was undertaking the White Creek Wind Farm project—one of the largest wind harvests in the state.

Tom returned as a consultant, and has been involved from the ground up.

Situated along the Columbia River, White Creek Wind has drawn substantial guidance from Tom's years of experience.

"He's one of the great minds that makes this project work," says Bjorn Hedges, White Creek Wind plant manager. "Tom was faced with the challenge of meeting the requirements of Initiative 937 and came up with the solution."

In 2006, Washington voters passed Initiative 937, which requires electricity

providers to generate 15% of their energy from renewable resources by 2020.

Bjorn says the wind farm has saved Washington taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, and Tom is one of the men directly responsible.

"Many of the how-to's came from Tom," Bjorn says. "His foresight and experience, plus his relationship with the other utilities, were key to making it happen."

Another person who has seen Tom's work through the years is KPUD auditor Jim Moss. Jim has worked with Tom for 24 years, and considers him a good friend.

"Tom is very community and civic minded," Jim says. "He wouldn't be the type to pat himself on the back, but he is instrumental in supporting our community overall, not just the PUD."

The results of Tom's work speak for themselves: millions of dollars of taxable infrastructure to the county, property and revenue taxes paid by project owners, and the generation of legislated and meaningful resources.

"I've just learned that if you put your head down and do your work, good things will happen," Tom says. ■