



Tom Svendsen dedicated more than three decades of his life to serving Klickitat PUD.

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Remembering a PUD Family Member

Tom Svendsen played a key role in the growth of the utility and the community

By Beth Schroder

The Klickitat County community lost an avid supporter when Tom Svendsen passed away January 4. Tom was 66 years old. He spent nearly 35 of those years working for Klickitat PUD, and several more years continuing to advance the projects and initiatives that led KPUD to be a leader in renewable resource use and development.

Tom began work at Klickitat PUD in August 1976. He came to the area as an

electrical engineer, filling the position of assistant engineer and conservation specialist. In 1979, Tom became acting manager of engineering and operations. In 1981, he became manager of engineering and operations and power management.

During part of his time as engineering manager, Tom worked under Brian Skeahan, who became KPUD general manager in 1994. Brian recalls the annual evaluation process with Tom as an entertaining and interesting experience.

“Tom saw this time as an opportunity to evaluate me as well,” Brian says. “It didn’t take me long to figure out that if I was smart, I probably should listen to what this guy was telling me.”

As engineering manager, Tom was involved in developing the partnership

with Northern Wasco PUD for the McNary Dam hydro project. He transitioned into the power manager role in 1999 and worked toward developing a generation project at the Roosevelt Regional Landfill. This would become the H.W. Hill Landfill Gas Project.

In 2003, Tom became general manager of Klickitat PUD. He served in that role until his retirement in 2009—the same year he was awarded the Washington Public Utility Districts Association Lifetime Achievement Award.

During this time, Tom was a driving force behind development of the White Creek Wind Project. It was at White Creek Wind, following his retirement from KPUD, that Tom worked with Plant Manager Bjorn Hedges. Bjorn describes

Tom as a perpetual planner.

“He was great about listening first—grasping the big picture—and then providing input for our path forward,” Bjorn says.

This forward-thinking was evident to Bjorn as Tom worked to ensure continuity and understanding about the work being done at White Creek as he planned to retire from his position due to health issues. Tom made sure there was someone to replace him—someone who understood the history of the project and received Tom’s knowledge.

“If something like this happened to me, I don’t know that I would be as helpful,” Bjorn says. “His attitude throughout his physical ordeal was inspiring.”

As much of an impact as Tom had on Klickitat PUD and White Creek Wind, he reached the people he worked with even more.

Klickitat PUD Engineering Manager Ron Schultz recalls Tom as being a brilliant engineer and visionary. Ron remembers the many times Tom helped him out.

Brian says he and Tom grew to be friends throughout the years and experienced some life-changing events together.

“We were in New York for business on the day of the terrorist attacks, which obviously was an experience that one doesn’t forget,” Brian says.

Bjorn says he didn’t have a great first impression of Tom but couldn’t pinpoint why. But that first impression would not remain.

“I have never been so wrong with a first impression,” Bjorn says. “As I got to know Tom, personally and professionally, my admiration and respect grew and continued to grow.”

Tom was active in the Goldendale Jaycees and received the JCI Senatorship award, which recognized his outstanding achievements and service to the community. Tom also was a member and past president of Goldendale Golf Club.

Tom will be missed for the creative way his mind worked in solving problems. He



will be missed for the commitment he had to making Goldendale and Klickitat County a better place. He will be missed for his generosity and compassion. And he will be missed for his staunch support of the University of Washington, especially against Washington State University.

Thank you, Tom, for all you brought to our communities and our lives. Your contributions will always be remembered. ■

ABOVE: Tom, left, receives the Washington Public Utility Districts Association Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009.

TOP: Tom was a driving force behind the development of the White Creek Wind Project.