

Western's moving forward

The lights went out at the Montrose dispatch center for the first time since Western employees moved into their offices at 1800 South Rio Grande Avenue, more than two decades ago. As Western moves forward to comply with industry-wide electric utility deregulation, **Ray**

Manspeaker, a former dispatcher and now scheduler, turned the lights out and went home at 6 p.m. that final day of dispatching power in Montrose. One week later the dispatch center re-opened as the CRSP-Resource Scheduling office and is now used solely to schedule and market power on a 24 hour basis.

Closing Montrose's dispatch center completed Transformation's control area consolidation recommendation, which has Loveland and Phoenix handling dispatch requirements once managed by Montrose.

When Manspeaker arrived home that day, he suddenly panicked wondering if he'd turned off the coffee pot—for it had always remained on when the dispatch center was open 24 hours a day. "Things are different now," Manspeaker reflected. "While we have a fully operational merchant function that now sells power around the clock, my day-to-day responsibilities are different. One big change is I no longer know if transmission is available on Western's transmission system." Western's dispatchers manage transmission to ensure system reliability and schedulers perform the merchant function, which means buying and selling power. "My job requires much more coordination with Western's dispatchers since this function is now separate. It was easier when I handled both dispatching and scheduling," he added.

John Stewart, another former Montrose dispatcher turned scheduler, remarked that the stress on the job hasn't gone away. "We have to be at our desks

12 hours a day to take calls from customers wanting to know if we have power to sell," he said. "The phones can be ringing off the hook at any given time."

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's Order No. 889 requires investor-owned utilities to separate transmission reliability and wholesale merchant functions. DOE is committed to having the power marketing administrations comply with the spirit and intent of the FERC Order.

Public Utilities Specialist **Jeff Ackerman** noted that the merchant function has added more responsibility in Montrose. They are now marketing power for RM and DSW—as well as buying and selling Colorado River Storage Project power.

UGP also has a fully established merchant function and operates mainly in the Mid-Continent Area Power Pool region. What's unique about the UGP is that its Watertown marketing office schedules power that's on the east side of the DC interties, which bridges the electrical separation of the eastern and western United States power system. UGP follows MAPP guidelines while the rest of Western conforms to the Western Systems Coordinating Council's way of doing business.

Differences among the nine reliability councils that make up the North American Electric Reliability Council are issues NERC is trying to resolve to ensure utilities can "keep the lights on" as the industry responds to deregulation. The expertise required in handling the loads vary from one side of the DC interconnection to the other because of the differences in transmission reliability requirements.

A Western team is still determining how it will separate its transmission function from its power marketing activities. A plan will be presented to Western's senior managers in July regarding functional separation throughout Western.

In addition to the real-time schedulers who handle the 12-hour desk, employees such as **Nancy Scheid**, power operations specialist in Montrose, works behind the scenes doing pre-scheduling for customers seeking power several days or weeks in advance. "We do a lot of post-scheduling,



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as well. By that, I mean once the real-time schedulers have done their job, I'll go back and make sure we have all the information needed so we can accurately bill our customers for the power sold to them. Things get really hectic on the floor when the two real-time schedulers are on duty—even the customers can get confused and call us to clarify transactions," Scheid said.

"What I like most about my job is facing new and different challenges every day. When the phone rings, I never know which customer may be calling and what information they need. Sometimes they'll call about a bill they received two months ago. The challenge is in knowing you're giving them the most accurate information and that they'll want to continue to do business with Western."

Ackerman said that on the surface nothing has changed. The only difference is now when excess power is sold to customers on the interconnected system, schedulers have to compete for transmission by going through the Open Access Same-Time Information System like everyone else. Much of

Western's transmission is reserved for firm power sales and there is no preferential knowledge of what transmission is available for surplus power sales.

Another point Ackerman made is that energy is still driven by demand. If it's hot outside, people need electricity to turn up air conditioners. But, he added, transmission availability, particularly in the WSCC service area, is becoming tighter.

Generation shortages will drive the development for new or increased generation, but it's not always easy to upgrade or add new transmission lines to a system. Any time you do a transmission system upgrade, you have to take the existing line out of service.

Rights-of-way for new transmission lines are getting harder and harder to come by because of environmental restrictions and people not wanting a transmission line in their backyards.

When asked if they ever dreamed they would grow up and have a job selling electricity, none of the Montrose staff interviewed envisioned a career in power marketing. Ackerman was finishing a master's degree in public administration and went to the Job Service Center to escape the three jobs he held at the time—working at J.C. Penney, in the potato fields and painting houses in Grand Forks, N.D. He applied for a job with the government at the encouragement of a personnel clerk who told him, "There's a vacancy with a Western Area Power Administration, but I don't know of anyone who's ever gotten a job from those types of vacancy announcements."

Stewart was working for Public Service Company of Colorado in Denver when a Western dispatcher job came open in Montrose in 1989. He'd been a lineman, electrician and dispatcher for PSCo but really wanted to move to Montrose. "It's hard trying to explain to your buddies just what you do," Stewart said. "Heck, they don't have a clue!"

Manspeaker was a voluntary reserve police officer in Montrose when a fellow reserve police officer who also worked for Western told him about a dispatch intern job. He went through Western's dispatcher internship program, completing training at the Electric Power Training Center that was then at the Denver Federal Center, nearly 15 years ago.

Scheid was working in a dead-end job with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Stabilization Conservation Service doing bookkeeping and accounting for farmland set asides. She applied for a job with Western as a scheduler and has never regretted it. She took a risk, however, transferring a little more than a year ago from Loveland to Montrose, not knowing if she would still have a job in light of Transformation.

Western is moving forward in the nation's deregulated electric power industry and will do its best to be competitive and meet customers' needs. Ackerman, Stewart, Scheid and Manspeaker and the many other Western employees involved are there to make sure it happens.

