



INFOlink

April/May 2002

In Memory of Charles Russell



Charles Russell,
NISC Director

NISC's Annual Membership Meeting, held March 10 in Dallas, Texas, was dedicated to the memory of NISC Board Director, Charles Russell, who passed away March 1.

NISC's Board of Directors, management and employees are deeply saddened by Charles' untimely death, and we will greatly miss the leadership and friendship he provided to our organization. We also wish to extend our deepest sympathies to his family and all the good people at Florida Keys Electric Cooperative in Tavernier, Fla., where Charles had dedicated more than 40 years to the rural

electric industry. Charles served as the cooperative's CEO and General Manager since 1989.

Charles was a member of the Central Area Data Processing Cooperative (CADP) Board of Directors from 1993 to 2000, and was elected to the position of Secretary for the Board in 1994 until the time of the NISC consolidation in 2000. Charles was instrumental in the success of the consolidation of CADP and North Central Data Cooperative (NCDC) as NISC, and served on NISC's first Board that was established in July of 2000.

The rural electric industry has suffered a great loss, and those of us who had the privilege of working with Charles will never forget his dedication and commitment. *INFOlink*

NISC Greet Large Turn-Out at Our 2002 Annual Meeting

Over 200 Members and guests attended NISC's Annual Meeting on March 10 in Dallas, Texas. During the business portion, the following Board of Directors were elected:



Members sign in at the NISC registration table for the Annual Meeting.

District 3 – Michael L. Miller, President/CEO of Nolin RECC, Elizabethtown, Ky.

District 10 – Delbert Smith, General Manager of Lamb County Electric Co-op, Littlefield, Texas.

District 11 – Larry Knegendorf, General Manager and President/CEO of Baldwin Telecom, Inc., Baldwin, Wis.

The Director for District 2 was left vacant with the death of Charles Russell. At their April 18th Board Meeting, NISC's Board of Directors will consider their available options to address this vacancy. Among the options to be considered include: holding a special election, appointing a successor, or some combination of these two.

To download presentation highlights from the Annual Meeting, please visit our web site at www.nisc.cc/pub/events. *INFOlink*

NISC On-Hand at NRECA's Tech Advantage® 2002 Expo

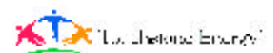
NISC staff members were kept busy demonstrating our services and software to Members and non-Members at NRECA's Tech Advantage® 2002 Conference and Expo.

A Compaq IPAQ Handheld PC was given away as a door prize. Kirby Chapman, Sulphur Springs Valley Electric, Ariz., was the lucky winner of the drawing.

We wish to thank everyone for stopping by our booth. *INFOlink*



NISC's booth at the NRECA Expo attracted a constant flow of customers during the four-day event.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS
National Information
Solutions Cooperative (NISC)

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
Chairman, Delbert Smith
Vice Chairman, Fred Dohrmann
Secretary, John Smith
Treasurer, Howard Johnson

ENERGY DISTRICT

1 Vernon Brinkley
A & N Elec. Co-op, Virginia

Advisory Directors
Larry Adams
Central Elec., Pennsylvania
Jim Mangum
Wake EMC, North Carolina

2 Vacant

3 Mickey Miller
Nolin Rural Elec., Kentucky

4 Chet Aubin
Johnson County REMC, Indiana

Advisory Directors
Larry Carlson
Tipmont REMC, Indiana
Bruce King
Cherryland Elec. Co-op, Michigan
Roger Yoder
Union Rural Electric, Ohio

5 John Smith
Pella Electric Co-op, Iowa

6 Fred Dohrmann
West Plains Elec. Co-op,
North Dakota

Advisory Director
David Weakland
Lake Region Co-op, Minnesota

7 Dan O'Brien
Kaw Valley Elec. Co-op, Kansas

Advisory Directors
Dan McClendon
Delta-Montrose Elec. Assn.,
Colorado

8 Larry Austin
Crawford Elec. Co-op, Missouri

Advisory Directors
Joe Harris
Kay Elec. Co-op, Oklahoma
C. Wayne Whitaker
Southwest Arkansas Elec.,
Arkansas
Jerry Williams
Claiborne Elec. Co-op, Louisiana

9 Duane Gackle
McCone Elec. Co-op, Montana

10 Delbert Smith
Lamb County Elec., Texas

NATIONAL TELEPHONE DIRECTORS

Larry Knegendorf
Baldwin Telecom, Inc., Wisconsin
Ron Brothen
Northwest Comm. Co-op,
North Dakota
Paul Freude
Paul Bunyan Rural Tele. Co-op
Minnesota
Howard "Bud" Johnson
3 Rivers Tele. Co-op, Montana

LEADER *Link*

Project Discovery

By Vern Dosch, CEO

Project Discovery, NISC's largest development effort, is well underway. After nearly 12 months of study, evaluation and benchmarking, design and development for the Consumer Information System (diversified utility billing), Subscriber Information System (Telecommunications billing) and Business Information System (accounting) products are moving forward with great urgency and excitement.

In another development, the positive response to our Member Investment Program has been most encouraging and will allow us to move forward as planned with our Project Discovery initiative. Some Members have committed substantial dollars to this investment program, while others have sent letters of support saying they will not be able to participate, but want to endorse the initiative. Although the dollars are enabling us to move forward, the support and affirmation from our Membership is just as important in the minds of our employees and Board of Directors.

Our goal in consolidating our organizations is to leverage the best practices, products and strengths of both CADP and NCDC. The rapid design, development and deployment of these critical software components are evidence that NISC is stronger, more nimble, and more focused than ever before.

Software is the lifeblood of our organization and the software development going on concurrently in St. Peters and Mandan will deliver the next generation of Energy and Telecommunications software products to our Member/Owners in timeframes never before thought possible.

These major development efforts are being orchestrated by competent project managers, and carried out by dedicated member service personnel, industry experts, analysts, developers, quality assurance personnel, and the most

talented staff of technical gurus ever assembled in our utility market. It is truly a thrill to be working for an organization that is aggressively pursuing its mission of delivering software products that are "Member Focused, Quality Driven, and Value Priced".

While the work of Project Discovery is the topic of much discussion, we will not take for granted the majority of our employees who are not assigned to Project Discovery, but rather are diligently working to support NISC's current product offering. Their task is to work side by side with our Membership to meet the day-to-day mission critical business requirements which include generating 5,500,000 bills, 36,000 payroll checks and 200,000 accounts payable checks, month in and month out.

Whether it is working on Project Discovery or taking care of immediate business concerns, we are passionate about our responsibilities and will never take for granted the opportunity we have been given to work for Members we enjoy, doing the work that we love, while making a difference in the rural Telecommunication and Energy industries that have been so good to us. INFO Link



Vern Dosch,
CEO



2002 Engineering & Operations Conference Follow-Up

NISC's annual Engineering & Operations (E&O) Conference was held in February with representatives from 68 cooperatives across the nation having the opportunity to learn about NISC's latest engineering products and services. [INFO Link](#)



Members saw demos and talked to NISC's E&O staff during the Expo portion of the meeting.



Members receive an update on happenings with the E&O group during the opening session.

New Agreement Signed with ESRI

By Wayne Poole, Engineering and Operations Manager

NISC announced at its 2002 Engineering and Operations Conference that it finalized a new partnership agreement with ESRI (Environmental Systems Research Institute).

ESRI is the world leader in the GIS industry. NISC, as a software solution provider, feels it is important to partner itself with ESRI and other leaders in IT because they have already invested in next-generation technology. ESRI has interest in and commitment to both small and larger companies, has a national network of resources and support, and has demonstrated its belief that true GIS is a vital and necessary part of any business system.

This agreement will move NISC from a Run-Time Agreement to a Corporate Consultant Business Partner, giving our Members the opportunity to be full ESRI license holders. Some key advantages are:

- Full documentation/extensive literature
- Customer Number allowing Internet log-on for support and posting of requests and/or information
- Invitation to ESRI Users Conference/ Training and access to online educational opportunities
- Other ESRI products at discount prices

This agreement positions NISC to provide a leading edge technology to our Members who are ready to manage system resources and data and to disseminate information to their people through sessions

with maps on PC and hand-held devices.

This new Partnership honors our previous agreement allowing current NISC Mapping (AutoCAD) users to migrate to NISC Visual Utility MapEdit for the investment of ESRI's first year maintenance. NISC continues to convert these Members for a set cost of 40 hours programming time.

We have 30 Members already on NISC Visual Utility MapEdit and another 50 NISC Mapping (AutoCAD) users yet to be converted to this new platform. These remaining 50 users will be notified by letter and asked to consider their needs and goals for moving to this new technology. NISC has added support and programming staff to handle this increased work and to provide the framework to support the decision to move to a true GIS product.

MapEdit not only allows Members to produce quality and project specific paper maps, but it also allows them to share engineering, customer, plant and electrical facilities, and service area information across all departments (in the office and in the field) by taking advantage of NISC's affordable Visual Utility MapView application. MapView is a lightweight (laptop and desktop deployable) electronic copy of the electrical system complete with intelligent point-and-click data contained in the edit station GIS. [INFO Link](#)

Welcome New NISC Members!

NISC welcomes the following organizations to Membership during the last year.

Utility Billing

Ouachita Electric, Camden, Ark.
James E. Tidwell, President & CEO

Sulphur Springs Valley Electric, Willcox, Ariz.
Creden W. Huber, CEO

Northwest Iowa Power, LeMars, Iowa
Stephen R. Brevig, General Manager

Ninnescah RECA, Pratt, Kan.
E. Walker Parris, General Manager

Atchison-Holt Electric, Rock Port, Mo.
Ronald E. Hunter, Manager

Columbus Electric, Deming, N.M.
Michael D. Fletcher, General Manager

Otero County Electric, Cloudcraft, N.M.
William F. Mershon, General Manager

Sierra Electric, Elephant Butte, N.M.
William F. Mershon, General Manager

Oneida-Madison Electric, Bouckville, N.Y.
Kenneth W. Budine, General Manager

Cotton Electric, Walters, Okla.
Mark Stubbs, General Manager

Telecomm

Iowa Telecom, Newton, Iowa
Allan Wells, General Manager

TVS Communications, Athens, Texas
Leonard Montieth, General Manager

Wes-Tex Telephone, Stanton, Texas
J.R. Wilson, General Manager

[INFO Link](#)



Member Support



Duane Miller began his career at NISC five years ago as an Electric Conversion Coordinator. He currently holds the position of Energy Support Coordinator II in the Energy Systems & Support (ESS) Division. His job responsibilities include answering support calls for Horizon, E-Bill, and Access billing programs.

According to Susan Kamerzell, CIS Member Support Team Leader, "Duane has been a team player all his life. Working at NISC has been no different. He pitches right in to help when Members are asking for assistance. He is a valued member of the ESS support team."

Duane holds a bachelor of business administration degree with a double major in management and accounting from the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks, N.D. (Go Sioux!)

A Grand Forks native, Duane currently resides in Bismarck, N.D., with his wife of 14 years, Tammy. They have two beautiful daughters, Kayla, 11 years old, and Cassidy, age 5. They recently welcomed a bouncing baby boy six months ago, named Nolan Ryan.

In his spare time, Duane likes to fish, go camping, and enjoys watching baseball, football and NASCAR racing. *INFO Link*

NISC's ASP Grows as Solution of Choice

NISC is pleased to report a growing acceptance for our Application Service Provider (ASP) solution. As you may recall from the article entitled, "KEM Electric Moves to Horizon ASP," which ran in the May 2001 issue of *InfoLink*, KEM Electric Cooperative, Linton, N.D., was our first Member to implement the ASP solution. KEM will go through a full year billing cycle this spring.

In the past year, we have welcomed Slope Electric Cooperative, New England, N.D., in August 2001; CamWal Electric Cooperative, Selby, S.D., in November 2001; Butte Electric Cooperative, Newell, S.D., in January 2002; Panhandle Rural Electric Membership Association (PREMA), Alliance, Neb., in February 2002; and Lake Region Electric Cooperative, Webster, S.D., in March.

The following customers are scheduled to move to the NISC ASP environment in April: Freeborn-Mower Co-op Services, Albert Lea, Minn.; Goldenwest Electric Cooperative, Wibaux, Mont.; Heartland Power Cooperative, Thompson, Iowa; McKenzie Electric Cooperative, Watford City, N.D.; and United Utilities, Inc., Anchorage, Alaska, which will be our first ASP Telecomm customer.

Through Horizon ASP, NISC provides business applications to customers while housing and maintaining the equipment they run on at an alternative location. ASP servicing allows for efficient accounting and business services at a low maintenance cost for cooperatives. Cooperatives using ASP also report that processing time has been drastically reduced by as much as three quarters of the time it took to previously run their Bill Calculation.

Simply put, the benefits ASP include:

- **Lower Capital Costs:** Applications are rented by the month rather than licenses upon installation and the Member does not have to purchase the application servers to drive the applications.
- **Lower Labor Costs:** ASP eliminates or reduces the need for internal information technology and other business-process professionals to operate those systems.
- **Core Competency:** It allows Members to invest in new customer-focused services such as Electronic Bill Presentment and Payment.
- **Obsolescence Insurance:** ASP eliminates the fear of purchasing an

application and/or system which may become obsolete rapidly.

NISC's ASP offering includes application software for BIS and CIS, hardware, software and maintenance fees, bill printing and insertion, technical support, and disaster recovery. Routine backups are provided and the history is maintained for 13 months. A state-of-the-art hosting facility is provided to physically house and manage NISC applications and services on network servers. Basin Electric Power Cooperative, Bismarck, N.D., serves as the host environment for any of the Horizon ASP hardware platforms, with each individual cooperative providing the circuit between Basin and its offices. The cooperatives run the same applications and procedures they did before switching to a Virtual Private Network (VPN). The difference is that the UNIX server is not housed at the cooperative's property. Expert staff is provided to manage and operate the ASP solution.

The goal of the NISC ASP product is to present a solution that appears as if the application is residing on the Members' local network. An employee at a Member site that is utilizing ASP should have no idea that the software applications are actually hosted perhaps thousand miles away. To achieve that goal, we utilize the most advanced technologies available including the use of dedicated broadband facilities.

Most rural electric and telephone systems in the United States fall in the small to medium business size category with 25 to 500 employees. These cooperatives are suited for the ASP environment and can benefit from reduced operating costs. A growing number of small business information technology managers are considering the use of an ASP in conjunction with future software implementation. Many cooperatives would prefer to pay an all inclusive per meter/subscriber amount, rather than having to budget for major capital expenditures when it comes to adding software applications and hardware.

Horizon ASP is just one more solution offered by NISC that helps our Members keep moving at the speed of technology. For more information on how your organization can benefit from Horizon ASP, please contact Ron Patton, NISC Energy Sales Manger, at 701.663.6511 ext. 203. *INFO Link*



WebEx – Attend a Meeting...Without Leaving Your Office

By Doug Remboldt, VP, Technical Services

Once in a while, as part of our continual search for new ways to deliver NISC's products and services, we find a tool that will truly change the way we do business. NISC began testing such a powerful tool, WebEx, this past fall.

WebEx is an Internet-based conferencing tool that allows presenters and participants to gather together in a "virtual" meeting environment on the Internet. WebEx can be used to demonstrate products, make presentations or collaborate on projects. During a virtual meeting, the presenter displays software that can be viewed and manipulated by participants connected to the meeting. Also, any software application on any participant's computer can be viewed and shared by all attendees of the meeting.

This concept allows NISC unlimited possibilities for sharing ideas and new products with our Members and prospective Members without the expense and time constraints of travel. In the past few months we have successfully used this tool to demonstrate products to existing and potential Members, and have managed to

eliminate or reduce travel both for NISC Members and employees.

Ever heard the expression, "A picture is worth a thousand words?" In terms of Member support, a picture can be worth a whole lot of time saved. The Remote Support capability of WebEx is another exciting aspect of this highly effective tool. Members sign in to a Remote session on the NISC website via WebEx. An NISC technical support employee shares the Member's desktop, providing live assistance, thereby significantly reducing the time needed to resolve a problem.

We believe that this is only the beginning. As NISC develops new products, tools like WebEx will allow us to gather Members together on the Internet to view our progress and direction, and provide input during product development when changes are easier to make.

We will also begin to utilize this tool for some training opportunities and presentations, all to be attended from the comforts of "home." INFO Link

Makin' Horizon Betta' with BETA

NISC is always looking for Members willing to be BETA test sites for our Horizon/HorizonPlus software releases. Being a BETA site helps NISC be a better software provider and therefore, helps your organization and your fellow Members as well.

A BETA version is a preliminary release of software sent to a few select NISC customers. These customers, who are chosen because of their interest in serving as a test site, agree to perform certain tests on the software and, in turn, can preview our newest software features and give us direct input on what is working well for them. We often enclose a checklist detailing the tasks we would like each site to complete during the BETA timeframe. Completion of these tasks is vital to the success of our products. We use input about any software errors or other concerns to enhance

our products for all Horizon/HorizonPlus customers.

When a customer is selected to be a BETA site, we ask them to install the BETA version of Horizon/HorizonPlus within two days of their receipt of it. We also ask them to inform all the employees in their office that the software running is a BETA version because each employee may have valuable input about the BETA software.

Each test site is designated a Quality Assurance (QA) contact person to be called when employees come across software errors or other concerns. NISC has approximately six weeks to correct BETA issues in time for the mass program release so we encourage any error to be reported promptly. Our goal is for all our Members to receive an error-free version of our programs.

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Horizon/ HorizonPlus 4.004 Update

NISC's Horizon and HorizonPlus version 4.004 software update was released March 28. Horizon Consumer Information Systems (CIS) and Order Activity (OA) solutions are now available with a graphical user interface (GUI) as part of the 4.004 release. Through the technology of WinFAST™, CIS and OA licensed users are able to take advantage of the Windows-based point-and-click environment. Conversions are not a requirement, and the traditional key mapping of Horizon billing remains in place so users can navigate with either the mousepad or the keyboard.

In addition, the 4.004 release includes Payroll/Labor in a graphical user format. GUI Payroll/Labor (PL) contains many features, including the ability to select accruals and costs to calculate at check run; 50 life calculation (no more manual figuring); mass reports to change accruals, deductions and costs; Other Accounts Receivable interface for payments of employee invoices; inquiry on batch hours; divisionalized entries; and much more. If you are interested in more information or have any questions, please contact the BIS Department at 701.663.6511, ext. 767.

For a complete listing that highlights the new features and functionality in the Horizon 4.004 release, please see the insert in this issue of InfoLink, or visit our website at www.nisc.cc. Then go to the Members Only section of our site, and then select the Releases link. INFO Link





Makin' Horizon Betta' with BETA *Continued from Page 5*

BETA sites receive an upgraded version of the Horizon/HorizonPlus programs when our mass program release is sent. It is necessary that they install this mass upgrade in order to receive any fixes or enhancements added since the BETA release was installed.

We thank each of the BETA sites for taking on the task of being the first to receive our latest and greatest software. We consider them to be an extension of our quality assurance team as they help put our software through its final test. BETA testing helps us to keep our mass release clean and running smoothly.

We wish to thank the following Members for making a difference in our software by being a BETA site for the Horizon/HorizonPlus 4.004 release: Capital Electric

Cooperative, Inc., Bismarck, N.D.; Consolidated Telcom, Dickinson, N.D.; Wes-Tex Telephone Cooperative, Inc., Stanton, Texas; Plumas-Sierra Rural Electric Cooperative, Portola, Calif.; West River Electric Association, Inc., Wall, S.D.; Farmers Mutual Telephone Company, Fruitland, Idaho; Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative, Inc., Flasher, N.D.; and Tongue River Electric Cooperative, Inc., Ashland, Mont.

By working together we can achieve the best products possible. If your company is interested in becoming a BETA test site for a future release, please contact Tammie Klein, Quality Assurance Team Lead, at 701.663.6511 ext. 129.

EVENTS

Member Advantage Program Classes

April

16-19 CIS Review, Results, Consultation Mandan, N.D.

May

6-9 CIS Review, Results, Consultation Rapid City, S.D.

June

TBD CIS Review, Results, Consultation Minneapolis, Minn.

July

15-19 CIS Review, Results, Consultation Fargo, N.D.

August

12-15 CIS Review, Results, Consultation Ulysses, Kan.

September

16-20 BIS Training Location TBD

Conferences and Meeting Dates

April

18-19 NISC Board Meeting – St. Louis

October

7-9 Horizon Member Information Conference – Radisson Inn, Bismarck, N.D.

9-11 Horizon Member Information Conference – Radisson Inn, Bismarck, N.D.



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Division Vice Presidents

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Chief Executive Officer

Ken Maine, Chief Operating
Officer, Energy

Scott Luecal, Executive Vice
President

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Doug Remboldt, VP,
Technical Services

Mark Momerak, VP,
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