

# Visit to embassy tempts her to go to 'real' country

Estonia. When I thought about this former Soviet satellite, which wasn't often, I imagined heavy food and cold winters, an underdeveloped nation struggling to survive in this new world of democracy.

Like most stereotypes, it holds water like a colander.

Each year in March, I visit an embassy during the National Newspaper Association meeting in Washington. Over the years I've been to Greece, Turkey, Chili, Costa Rica and Saudi Arabia.

On each visit, I have discovered wonderful, interesting things about the country, which according to international protocol and law, is where I'm standing when I'm in their embassy.

This year I got to visit Estonia, of which I knew almost nothing except a guess that it was once part of the Soviet Union.

That part was mostly right. Estonia was governed by the Soviets from the 1940s through the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Estonia, a small nation which claims hundreds of islands off its shore, is tucked on the top of Europe between Finland, Sweden, Russia and Latvia.

It isn't the world's smallest nation — it's only a little smaller than Massachusetts and New Hampshire combined — but has one of the world's smallest populations.

And, we're told, Estonians speak



## Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes  
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Estonian. Well, that figures.

Many of them also speak Finnish because much of the television programming they watch comes from Finland. Many speak Russian because a lot of ethnic Russians migrated into Estonia during the Soviet occupation.

There are still an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 Russian speakers within the country. For that reason, the government says, 503 schools teach in Estonian, 80 in Russian, 26 in both, two in English and Estonian and one in Finnish and Estonian.

"We have 100 nations in a small country, all living together," the ambassador says.

So how does this small, northern European nation make a living? What do its people do to survive?

Well, the ambassador told us with a smile, they make furniture because the country has extensive forests. And, oh yes, mobile phones.

Estonia, he said, is a big exporter of information technology and

Estonians use cell phones and the Internet extensively.

Banking is mostly done over the Internet, the ambassador said, adding that he had never written a check in his life until moving to the U.S. to take his position.

All schools are connected to the Internet and 65 percent of the population are Internet users, he said. For those without a wireless connection in their homes, the government has it available in 1,000 public locations.

And of course, Estonia has tourism. There are no direct flights from the U.S., though, and while 70,000 Americans visited Estonia last year, most were off of cruise ships. The ambassador said he is working to increase the numbers.

Europeans like to visit the many picturesque islands, he said, and the country had 4 million tourists last year.

Well, he sold me. I'll bet the food is good, too.

# Power plants need to keep prices down for rural users

By ALLAN MILLER

*Prairie Land Electric Co-op*  
Since Rod Bremby, as secretary of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, denied an air permit for the Holcomb powerplant expansion on Oct. 18, Sunflower Electric Power Corp. has endured public criticism from people who contend that Kansans should obtain their energy from sources other than coal.

As the manager of Prairie Land Electric Cooperative, which provides electric service in 18 counties in northwest and north central Kansas, I'd like to share some information with you about the impact of this project on electric rates.

First, Sunflower is a nonprofit utility that operates as the wholesale power provider for six rural electric cooperatives in central and western Kansas, including Prairie Land, based in Norton. On behalf of all six cooperatives, Sunflower owns and operates generating units fueled by coal, natural gas and wind. Sunflower's existing coal facility, a 360 megawatt plant south of Holcomb in Finney County, is the cleanest coal plant in Kansas.

The proposed expansion involves two additional plants at the Holcomb Station. The \$3.6 billion project will provide \$750 million in financial benefits to Sunflower, covering costs that won't have to be passed on to its member cooperatives.

These financial benefits, in addition to cash payments, include lower fuel costs, reduced operating costs, and the economies of scale of a larger facility. Power from the two new units will be used by members of 67 rural cooperatives in Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, New Mexico and Texas.

The project will create more than 2,400 construction jobs in southwest Kansas over six years. After completion, the new plants would create more than 325 jobs in Kansas.

### But Why Use Coal?

Electric cooperatives are required to provide their members with reliable electricity at the lowest possible cost.

The United States has more than one-third of the world's proven coal reserves, more coal than Saudi Arabia has oil. If we want to be energy independent, coal is a reliable source or energy that can serve our nation for many generations to come. The abundance of coal also helps keep the price affordable. Because coal is economical and reliable, for those who care about costs, it is the fuel of choice.

Other fuels have characteristics that make them less desirable. Because natural gas is not as plentiful as coal, the law of supply and demand makes it more expensive. Consumers will see a substantial increase in energy prices if a "no-coal" policy is adopted here.

Hydroelectric generation is not a reasonable alternative in Kansas, and nuclear plants are prohibitively expensive.

Solar energy seems like a logi-

## Opinion

cal choice, but this developing technology is not yet advanced for large-scale use, and the cost is staggering. In December 2007, Power magazine estimated the production cost for the world's largest solar project in Germany was \$510 per megawatt hour.

Wind energy seems like the solution to many people. However, base-load units such as large coal plants operate consistently at 90 percent capacity, while wind systems average less than 40 percent. Since the wind blows intermittently, consumers cannot rely exclusively on it.

### No Coal? Higher Rates

Understanding why coal is the most cost effective requires knowledge of how electricity is measured. A kilowatt is the basic unit of electric demand, equal to 1,000 watts. A kilowatt hour is a unit of energy equal to 1,000 watt hours. For example, a 100 watt light bulb burning for ten hours uses one kilowatt hour. Electric bills are based on the price per kilowatt hour and the number of kilowatt hours consumed.

Generation facilities measure output in megawatts, equal to 1,000 kilowatts or 1 million watts. A megawatt hour is equal to 1,000 kilowatt hours or 1 million watt hours.

In 2007, production costs for Sunflower's Holcomb Station averaged \$12.23 per MWh, and costs for Sunflower's gas-based generation plants were \$68.68 per MWh. The average home uses approximately 1,000 kWh per month, so relying on natural gas would increase members' annual electric rates by more than \$675.

### Stewards of the Environment

Sunflower's member cooperatives primarily serve those who make their living off the land, a large number of large and small businesses and many residential consumers. Knowing that you, our customers, care not only about affordable electric rates but also about living in a healthy environment, we continue to seek and implement technological solutions to upgrade our generation.

Due to the significant investment in these new technologies, today's generation from coal is more efficient and results in lower carbon dioxide emissions and less coal being burned for the power produced. A comparison of 2006 emission rates from the eight Kansas coal plant facilities shows that Sunflower's has the lowest emission rate in the state for sulfur dioxide, nitrous oxide and carbon dioxide. Advanced technology to be used on the new units at Holcomb will further reduce emission rates.

Sunflower has made significant investments in wind power. The combined capacity of Sunflower and Mid-Kansas Electric Co. has 124 megawatts of wind energy, more than 12 percent of our native load. Only Midwest Energy, our

cooperative neighbor, will have a larger percentage of its load dedicated to wind energy by the end of 2008. Cooperatives are leading the way in wind development in Kansas.

### You Can Help

Your Kansas legislators have passed a bill that would help provide customers in central and western Kansas with affordable and reliable electricity. Gov. Kathleen Sebelius has vetoed this bill, which will come back up in the House and Senate for an override vote.

The success of the Holcomb project will have a definite and immediate impact on you.

To help ensure that this project is successful, I encourage you to contact legislators and let them know that people in central and western Kansas deserve the same reliable, affordable energy and economic benefits enjoyed by those elsewhere in the state.

Time is of essence, so please act today.

To find out how your legislators voted on the energy bill, go to [www.kec.org](http://www.kec.org) and click on Support Sound Energy Policies in Kansas

If you have questions, call our office at (800) 577-3323 or stop in for a visit.

*Allan Miller is general manager of Prairie Land Electric Cooperative at Norton and a board member of Sunflower Electric Power Co. of Hays, which hopes to build the Holcomb Expansion project.*

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Back row: Regina, Linda, Gary, Bob and Kevin. Front row: Sheree, Jan, Linda and Cheri.

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