



A visit with *Jack Dent*

Jack Dent retired from the position of Municipal Services Officer with Manitoba Hydro on January 1, 2006. The AMM caught up with Jack recently and asked him to reflect on his 14 years spent working closely with AMM members.

Jack Dent is well known to municipal officials throughout Manitoba. He began a career with Manitoba Hydro in 1969, and retired from the corporation in 2006. The last 14 years of his career were spent as Municipal Services Officer. His role was primarily customer service. “Hydro felt that if we were able to stay close to our municipal customers, and help them to identify opportunities, we would have satisfied customers,” explains Jack. “This creates a win-win situation for everybody.”

Jack’s various positions with Hydro took him from Dauphin, to Winnipeg, to Thompson, to Selkirk, and back to Winnipeg. While these communities were his home base, Jack spent countless days on the road traveling throughout every region of Manitoba with the AMM, and before that with both MAUM and UMM.

Jack estimates that Manitoba Hydro has had a municipal liaison position for 50 or 60 years. The need for such a position arose back when rural electrification was taking place. Rural residents needed services, and Manitoba Hydro needed the assistance and cooperation of the mayors, Reeves and councillors to bring electricity to people. Roads had to be built, right-of-ways determined, and customers with electrical appliances identified. It was during this time that Manitoba Hydro saw the need to have an ongoing relationship with the municipal customers it served, and created the Municipal Services Officer position.

Initially, the position was to be Jack’s for a period of two years, after which it would rotate to another Hydro employee. However, Hydro decided to keep Jack in the position. “You develop a relationship with your customers, and with that relationship comes

trust,” Jack says. “Municipalities got to know me and felt comfortable sharing information with me, as I did with them. Hydro decided to keep me in that position so that I could continue building on those relationships, which I did for 14 years.”

While Jack has many memories of his years in municipal service, some events stick out in his mind. Recalling his very first Mayors, Reeves and CAOs meeting in the Town of Arborg, he relates a tough question posed to him by the Reeve of Gimli at that time: “What is one inch of water on Lake Winnipeg worth to Manitoba Hydro?” Always quick with a response, Jack admitted,

“I really appreciated all the good times I had with my municipal friends.”

“I don’t know the answer to that question, but I promise you I will find out before the end of this meeting.” He did. “I told him that during high water conditions, one inch of water isn’t worth much, but when there is little water, one inch of water can be worth millions!”

Years of driving to municipal events no doubt resulted in some bad-weather stories, and Jack recounts this one: “The RM of Archie was set to host a Mayors, Reeves and CAOs meeting in McAuley, Manitoba. The AMM executive and I awoke in our hotel in Virden to find ourselves in the middle of a blizzard. We gathered in the lobby to decide what to do. Having never missed a meeting, we decided to set out, even through a terrible snowstorm. We made it, and on time, too. We were feeling pretty smug, until we found out that Donna Jamieson, CAO of Archie, had already been to Virden – and back – to pick up donuts for the meeting!” To Jack, this type of action is not unusual, and speaks volumes

about the dedication of municipalities who host AMM events in their communities. “Not only that, the meeting took place on St. Patrick’s Day, and the whole hall was decorated. The host community had gone all out to prepare for the meeting. We were sure glad we decided to brave the weather!”

Jack estimates logging between 300,000 and 400,000 km driving to municipal functions over the years. “I never got tired of the driving,” he says when asked. “I really enjoy driving, and I pride myself on always arriving early for meetings.” When asked if he has a favorite route or highway, he cites Highway 83 that runs alongside the western side of the province. “It’s very scenic and there is always something new to see – we even followed a bear down the highway during one trip!”

One of the things most people notice about Jack is that he is always cheerful and happy. When asked how he maintains his positive outlook, Jack says it’s simple. “I always felt grateful to work for Hydro. They have been very good to our family (Jack’s wife, Lauren, is also employed by Hydro). They offer a very supportive environment and it’s easy to feel positive when your employer acknowledges and supports what you do.” He adds that the AMM executive and members are also a contributing factor. “The AMM always accepted me and made me feel a part of the team. I really enjoyed my work at the AMM functions, especially running the elections at June Districts and Convention!”

Retirement, for Jack, means time to do some of the things he didn’t have time for while working full time. That includes spending more time with his family – son John, who recently graduated from the U of M with an Arts degree; daughter Melissa who is working on her Ph. D. at the St. Boniface Heart Research Centre; and wife Lauren.

When asked about his favorite memory of his time with the AMM, Jack simply says “the people. I really appreciated all the good times I had with my municipal friends. I hope they had as much fun as I did.”