

## District 1

### **MARK A. ETHEN - INCUMBENT**

1275 130th Avenue NE, Blaine, MN 55434

#### **Occupation**

Commercial Banking

#### **Board Experience**

Connexus Energy Board of Directors, Current Vice Chair (2006-Present)

Northeast Bank, Board Loan Committee (Chair 2010-Present)

Minnesota Racing Commission, Commissioner, Finance Committee Chair (2010-2014)

Great River Energy Board of Directors, Connexus Energy Representative Director (2020-2022)

#### **Post-Secondary Education**

St. Thomas University, St. Paul, MN - Master Business Administration - Master Finance

St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN - Bachelor of Science - Finance and Public Administration, Double Major



#### ***What do you believe is an important opportunity and the most important challenge facing Connexus Energy, and how would you address both if you were elected?***

The most important opportunity for Connexus is leveraging the flexibility of its 2022 GRE purchase power contract change from a member to a customer. Now Connexus can shop available sources for power in the broader marketplace. Additionally, it allows Connexus to select generation type that goes into its power portfolio. This will allow Connexus to meet its objectives and the requirements that are put on by regulatory mandates. This opportunity also allows for new technologies to be introduced onto the system. I will support efforts that leverage this flexibility for the benefit of the Connexus membership.

The most significant challenge facing Connexus is managing its way toward Minnesota's 2040 100% carbon-free mandate. In recent years, Connexus has been able to navigate onboarding renewable resources while keeping the system reliable and affordable. I will support resources that meet these requirements in the most financially responsible manner possible.

#### ***What do you believe members want from their electric utility and what keeps them satisfied with Connexus Energy?***

Connexus Members have historically desired strong reliability and affordable rates and I believe overall the members desire the same in the future. More recently, sustainability has become more important to the membership. The Cooperative has been successful with implementing sustainable solutions while not adversely impacting rates and reliability. I believe that continues to be what members want to see out of Connexus. In addition to these three, I do believe members are looking for more flexibility and optionality in pricing and services. New rate programs that best fit the member characteristics I believe will be something desired more in the future.

#### ***What personally motivates you to serve on the Connexus Energy Board of Directors?***

I believe the products and services provided by Connexus Energy are so impactful, day in and day out to so many people in the area where I have worked and lived for so many years, that it is so very rewarding to serve the membership on the board of directors. When you see and believe you have positively contributed directly to something that has materially benefited your family, friends, neighbors and business colleagues, it truly inspires you to work even more diligently on their behalf. It has been a very inspiring and humbling experience being on the Connexus Board, and it is hard to imagine something that could be as impactful to the community that utilizes some of the skills that I believe I bring to the table as a member of the board of directors.

#### ***What do you believe are the top three reasons you would be well-qualified to serve on the Connexus Energy Board of Directors?***

My financial and business acumen is very strong, with over 30 years of reviewing financial statements and business plans via my primary occupation in commercial banking. I have seen highly sophisticated business operations and very simple operations, and everything in between, accessing their credit risk profiles along the way. I have participated in strategic planning at all levels within organizations from action plan development to direct implementation. Overall, my ability to make business sense out of a wide variety of situations is strong.

My connection to communities served by Connexus is strong, having worked and lived in Blaine for over 30 years now. The success of my professional career has been dependent on keeping connected to what is happening in the north metro working for community banking organizations in the area. Additionally, I have been actively involved in many local non-profit organizations over the years. This connectivity provides me valuable input and feedback into the impact of Connexus on people and businesses in our service territory.

The financial institutions that I have worked for over the years have one thing in common, they rely on high customer service standards to attract and retain customers. Working in the private sector has disciplined me in the art of customer service and the important role it plays in retaining and satisfying customers. My understanding of customer service translates well into building expectations for evaluating and providing effective feedback to Connexus leadership around customer service standards.

#### ***Tell us what you believe are three of the most impactful member-owner benefits of the electric cooperative business structure?***

The most significant from my perspective is that the financial results and performance of the organization go to benefit the member owner, not some shareholder. If the organization is able to do things more effectively and efficiently, the individuals benefit from those results. Connexus employees are very aware of this relationship and it is highly motivating to the workforce, and the results are evident. Connexus Energy returned over \$8 Million back to members in the form of Cash Back Credits in 2023. As a director, I believe it is imperative to ensure that member financial benefit is at the center of the decisioning thought process.

Member self-governance is a very impactful benefit. The members elect the board members that take actions on their behalf. Directors are held accountable to the members via frequent election cycles, ensuring that the actions desired by the members are taken up by their elected representatives. In the electric cooperative world, the board of directors sets and approves rates for its customers, without direct interference from utility commissions (political influence). Self-governance keeps decision making local and efficient for the members of the electric cooperative.

The cooperative business structure also emphasizes equality, where each member carries the same influence on voting and control of the organization. This principle of equality applies in the rate setting methodology, where the cost causer is the cost payer and each like group of members experiences the same prices. Rates are reviewed on a regular basis to determine the cost of service by customer category, with adjustments to those rates to keep balance in cost recovery methodology so that each member is treated fairly relative to the other.

#### ***Regarding your skills as a potential director, tell us one of your strengths and how it would contribute to the Connexus Board and list one weakness needing development and your plan to address it.***

My financial expertise/business acumen is one of my primary strengths I would bring to the board of directors. It allows me to effectively review virtually any business, ask relevant questions to garner appropriate background and supporting information, and make a sound judgment as to the logic being applied in that given situation and decision. It is something I have been doing in business for years in my commercial underwriting work. As my experience has grown in this area, so has my ability to more effectively communicate with others in the process.

One weakness I have as it relates to the Connexus Board is that I am not an electrical field professional. I was not educated in the energy field, nor am I an engineer. Over my years of service on the Connexus Board, my knowledge level related to the general electrical business has grown, but I continue to try to build on my knowledge in that area. I participate in field visit opportunities and look for ongoing educational training opportunities as they are available to broaden my knowledge of specifics within the energy business. While my knowledge of the specifics is more limited, I do work to keep myself very informed on new technologies and new industry trends and find this very helpful in my role as a director.