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For nearly 20 years, North Dakota state government has partnered with DCN to provide reliable network services for our agencies, K-12 schools, and colleges and universities. By working with DCN, we’re able to deliver high-speed internet services to every one of our locations, including the most rural, giving all North Dakota state employees and students access to technology that enables them to be more efficient and collaborative. Most importantly, it ensures our students are equipped with the tools to be successful in a 21st century economy.

Duane Schell
Chief Technology Officer
State of North Dakota

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You know what they say about the best-laid plans, well, COVID-19 took ours, crumpled them up in a little ball, and threw them in an incinerator. I’m sure many of you feel the same way. And like many of you, the Greater North Dakota Chamber (GNDC) has had to pivot quickly to respond. Our response has been in the form of helping our members and the broader business community through this tumultuous time.

Your membership investment supports GNDC and, in turn, allows us to provide you news, information, and advocacy, all of which are designed to improve and defend North Dakota’s business climate. Usually, this means providing member-only services and advocacy. However, since this crisis has begun, we have provided business assistance information to employers all across North Dakota regardless of membership, intending to ensure businesses and our economy have an opportunity to rebound after the devastation caused by COVID-19. This broad outreach has taken the form of weekly business briefs with the North Dakota Department of Commerce and other state officials, frequent communication with local chambers, and trade association to get the right information out in a timely fashion. In addition, we’ve partnered with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis to survey North Dakota employers to help the FED better develop monetary policy in response to COVID-19. These and other efforts are summarized on our COVID-19 hub along with links to critical resources, which can be seen at ndchamber.com/covid19.

This broad outreach hasn’t prevented us from supporting our members, though, as we continue to interact with state officials and our congressional delegation daily, responding to your questions, concerns, and needs. GNDC has also been providing webinars on issues to address concerns that we are hearing from our members. We’ve highlighted how member businesses are trying to adapt to a world of social distancing and business closures. As a matter of fact, this issue of the Report on Business does just that.

One of the notable absences you may notice in this issue the Report on Business or our email newsletter, the Dakota Digest, is that we are not featuring a medical representative. Their absence is not because we don’t care. Instead, their absence is because North Dakota hospitals and clinics are on the front lines of this fight, intensely focused on the safety of the public and their staff, while also managing the business challenges the rest of us are facing. We are very grateful to them for everything they are doing. Their efforts are inspiring.

As I write this, we’re all dealing with a lot of uncertainty, and the news headlines are troublesome, but because I’m a glass half-full kind of person, I hope that next spring, when we look back on the COVID-19 outbreak of 2020, we can reflect on how people responded in positive ways. A few examples I can think of include:

- Our education system reinvented itself in a matter of days to allow for online education.
- Restaurants created new ways to serve food to the public during a very trying time.
- Manufacturers of all kinds responded to public health needs by making needed essential medical supplies.
- Lawmakers in Washington were able to compromise and swiftly passed the CARES Act and Families First Coronavirus Response Act to help Americans through COVID-19.
- Many of us participated in virtual meetings whether they were happy hours, birthdays parties, or worship. We stayed connected to support one another.
- North Dakota elected and appointed public officials stepped up and showed that ND is fortunate to have great leaders.
- We remembered to thank truck drivers and other frontline workers, who ensured that we could still get food, fuel, and everything else modern life relies on.
- Finally, for me at least, I was able to spend more distraction-free time with my family, playing board games, and enjoying real family dinners.

I also hope and expect that when this strife ends, North Dakota businesses can help lead the nation’s economic recovery through the ingenuity, grit, and common-sense approach that has allowed our small state to do big things.

As always, please feel free to reach out to me with your comments, questions, or concerns.

Sincerely,

Arik Spencer
CEO and President
The pandemic has been felt differently by each person and company. Some feeling immediate gut-punching impacts while others were inconvenienced as they shifted operations to discover a new normal. GNDC’s Board of Directors is an involved group of individuals who represent all regions, sizes, and sectors of North Dakota business. To better gauge the overall mindset of the business community, we visited with members of our board and asked, “How is COVID-19 impacting you?”

Tom Astrup – American Crystal Sugar
We are fortunate at American Crystal Sugar that we continue to operate and provide good jobs to our employees and income to our farmer-members as we take seriously our role in continuing to provide food for the country. The pandemic has caused us to review all our work practices and modify them as appropriate to ensure that we are not jeopardizing the health and safety of our employees in the process.

Jill Berg – Spherion Staffing
Spherion Staffing, a regional Employment Agency in ND, SD and MN, has made significant adjustments as the challenge of sourcing and finding people to work has become increasingly more difficult with furloughed or laid-off applicants. Individuals are choosing to remain on unemployment benefits rather than going to work when work is available as they are making more on unemployment than they would if they return to work. Individuals apply for Unemployment Insurance (UI) and receive a 12-week “safety-net” drawing their weekly state benefit in addition to the $600 Federal gift. These “rich” benefits create a disincentive for them to go to work and will only contribute to an elongated recovery. We are getting rejections or in most cases no response from people when work is available. Small businesses are getting an 8-week reprieve with the PPP. The compounding effect of these factors will only contribute to a long climb out. I’m concerned about what this will mean for our state as the unemployment funds continue to drain – will businesses pay the penalty in UI rate increases while fighting to recruit and retain their workforce? What will we look like in 2021?

Cory Fong – MDU Resources Group
It seems like overnight COVID-19 became the only thing on our minds. On the flipside COVID-19 will have longstanding impacts on all facets of our lives for the foreseeable future.

Nick Hacker – North Dakota Guaranty & Title
Although our business volume has held steady, the disruption of moving 50% of our staff to working from home has taken a toll on our business, especially the behavioral health of our team. Providing them support and continual contact with leadership has proven successful in maintaining a positive outlook by our team. We are finding diamonds in the rough during this time and look forward to a broad recovery in the second half of the year.

Tonya Holmstrom – Schmitz-Holmstrom, LLP
The past few months have been one for the record book. Schmitz-Holmstrom CPA launched our new firm, faced many challenges that new businesses often do, including having to lead our team remotely through the Covid-19 pandemic. We are thankful that our industry has the ability to work remotely and we were able to continue providing
imperative services to our clients. Without the help of GNDC and their resources via the ND Department of Commerce and Governor Burgum’s office, we could not have successfully managed those challenges. We are confident that our staff, our firm, our clients, and our communities are in better hands because of the efforts of our wonderful state chamber. Thank you GNDC!

**Vaune Johnson – Cornerstone Bank**

We have learned many lessons from the simultaneous pandemic and severe drop in oil prices. The first is that we are blessed to be American. Another is that our channels of conducting business have drastically changed. We have learned to leverage and advance adoption of technology. Some change has been challenging but we continue to adapt and persevere. That’s what our nation has done for generations!

**Brent Lohnes – Hess Corporation**

The safety of our workforce and the communities where we operate is Hess’ top priority. In response to COVID-19 pandemic, we have established an enterprise-wide cross functional team specifically for COVID-19 and have also activated response teams for each of our operated assets including North Dakota. These teams have been implementing a variety of health and safety measures in consultation with suppliers and partners that are based on the most current recommendations by public health agencies and government/regulatory directives. This includes enhanced cleaning procedures and modified work practices such as travel restrictions, health screenings, reduced personnel at onshore work sites and offshore platforms wherever this can be done safely, and remote working arrangements for office workers. We have reinforced directly with all contractors our expectations for procedures and actions of their employees who work on Hess projects. I’ll close by saying that we will continue to be proactive in managing the COVID-19 threat and working closely with state and local officials to protect the health of the communities where we operate, protect our workforce and families and to help our neighbors recover from its impact.

**Brekka Kramer – Odney**

We all live in a much different world than a few weeks ago. As consumer behavior, supply and demand, and policies continue to evolve, we are working hard to help our clients in various sectors from energy to tourism navigate these new waters as smooth as possible.

During this unprecedented time, it’s necessary that your brand responds appropriately to employees and customers, so they know that you’re doing all you can to help with COVID-19. Getting the message right is something that has always been a focus of our agency, but now more than ever it is critical. Make sure your messaging resonates with your target audience. Now is the time to be compassionate, credible and consistent.

I hope you and your families are staying healthy and safe. We’ll get through this together.

**Roger Reierson – Flint Group**

As a marketing communications agency our work has shifted. We are working with our clients and partners to implement strategic plans to deal with this new world, crafting thoughtful messaging, and finding creative ways to best serve their customers during these unprecedented times. As we sustain another month of pandemic-related shutdowns, we’re working with clients for long-term, customer-focused solutions. Brands who step up to support their customers and communities, through flexibility, charity and creativity, will weather the storm better than others.
Every industry in the United States is being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in one way or another. One industry that is being especially tested is internet service providers.

Some may assume that North Dakota, due to its remoteness, would be underserved by the broadband industry, but that is simply not true. In fact, North Dakota is uniquely equipped thanks to Dakota Carrier Network (DCN). DCN is owned by 14 of the rural broadband service providers in the state. These companies have been progressive and aggressive in providing the state with world-class access, investing more than $1.3 billion in fiber optic infrastructure over the past decade.

**KEY IN CRISIS**

The key is that it’s a fiber optic network. This is vital, particularly in the COVID situation, because fiber optics scale very quickly. This spring, as we realized the situation was going in the direction of schools and many businesses transitioning to working at home, DCN began increasing the backbone network capacity. In fact, DCN doubled overall internet backbone capacity to prepare for the expected bandwidth demand growth.

As DCN’s network engineers had planned for this type of event, some questioned if the overall consumption would remain constant as it shifted from businesses and schools to mostly home-based use. Would bandwidth at the corporate offices diminish because most of their employees were working from home? The opposite turned out to be true. Several of DCN’s commercial customers actually increased their corporate internet connection capacity in order to support the bandwidth increases caused by the employees working from home via VPN (virtual private network) connections back to the corporate network.

**CONSUMPTION INCREASES**

DCN directly provides services to commercial and governmental entities like energy, ag, medical, banking, IT, and utilities; as well as state government, K-12 schools, and higher education. DCN indirectly serves residential customers who purchase broadband through one of its Owner Companies, often a rural broadband cooperative.

As the coronavirus crisis went into full swing, almost overnight the State of North Dakota sent more than 7,000...
state employees home to work remotely; 110,000 students were at home beginning distance learning; and countless businesses were sending employees home to work. Suddenly, IP-based collaborative video conferencing caused a dramatic increase in bandwidth use because people were working from home using tools like Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

While all industries are important, there was a particular urgency to serve K-12 students. Working with the state’s Department of Public Instruction, Information Technology Department and Governor Burgum’s office, it was determined that there were students in roughly 72,000 homes outside of Bismarck, Fargo, and Grand Forks that might not have broadband access. That meant North Dakota’s rural broadband service providers were going to have to be prepared to scale network capacity in a very short amount of time.

As North Dakotans stayed safely at home, their use of the internet increased not only for work and school, but also for entertainment with online streaming of apps like Netflix, YouTube, and Amazon. They also realized that those video conferencing tools could help them stay connected to their friends and loved ones, and they could stay connected to their churches and faith-based organizations as services began to be streamed through applications like Facebook Live.

To illustrate this increase, typically DCN’s users consume 3.4 Petabytes of Netflix traffic per month, and in the last two weeks of March, that number increased by over 40%. Even with this enormous increase, DCN has been able to maintain 99.999% of network uptime.

Without reliable broadband internet, none of this would be possible. Connectivity through DCN allows state government to serve our citizens, students to continue learning, businesses to serve their customers, and so much more. While no one knows how long this pandemic will affect all aspects of daily life, one thing is certain: North Dakotans will stay connected.

Arndorfer is the CEO at DCN – Dakota Carrier Network. For more information, please visit their website at DakotaCarrier.com. ■
IN FOCUS: GATE CITY BANK

GATE CITY BANK: SUPPORTING CUSTOMERS, COMMUNITIES AND TEAM MEMBERS

By Amy Durbin

A pandemic might keep us physically separated, but we will stay connected. That’s the mindset Gate City Bank has embraced amid global disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar to medical facilities, utilities and grocery stores, banks are considered essential.

While the world has changed drastically in recent weeks, Gate City Bank hasn’t wavered in its mission to help customers, communities and team members achieve a better way of life. The organization developed a pandemic response plan 15 years ago and recently set it in motion so people can maintain uninterrupted access to the services, support and resources they rely on daily.

Ensuring continued ease of access to financial services

Gate City Bank’s lobbies and grocery store locations are temporarily closed to help fight the spread of COVID-19, but drive-ups and night depositories remain open. All banking services can be handled at the drive-ups, including opening checking accounts. The Bank is happy to work with customers at the drive-up or by appointment, whichever they prefer. Additionally, the organization has implemented extended hours in Customer Service to better serve customers.

The Bank has also made sure that customers can continue to bank anywhere, 24/7 by offering an easy-to-use mobile app and helpful online banking tools. These options allow customers to view, monitor and open accounts, as well as apply for loans and finance a vehicle – all from the comfort of your own home.

Gate City Bank also cares about customers’ safety and well-being, so it regularly provides COVID-19 updates via its website, customer emails and social media pages. For example, the Bank recently shared information on how to watch out for fraudulent activity, which often spikes during times like this. Gate City Bank has also offered security tips to help customers safeguard their computers and mobile devices.

The Bank continues to let customers know they are cared for and not alone during this difficult time, and that relief options are available. It has implemented special programs to assist customers who have experienced financial stress due to a business closing, job loss or reduction of work hours as a result of COVID-19. Some of the relief benefits from these programs include features like no payments for 60 days, waived late fees and no foreclosures or repossessions on loans. Additionally, past-due loans will not be reported negatively to credit reporting agencies.

Gate City Bank’s BetterLife™ Loan*, a 30-month program, includes a maximum amount of $2,500 per individual ($5,000 maximum per household), no fees and up to 90 days until the first payment, with a fixed rate of 1.00% APR*. Anyone
wanting to learn more about this program is encouraged to contact Gate City Bank, and a team member will guide them through next steps.

*Terms and conditions may apply.

**Giving back to communities in need**
Gate City Bank team members have always promoted a culture of giving back to the communities in which they live and work. It’s a culture that remains strong. From donating more than 22,000 of its blue tote bags to students transferring home-learning materials, to delivering pizza to heroic health care workers, to displaying #WorldOfHearts support at drive-up and lobby windows, the Bank’s locations across North Dakota and central Minnesota are letting communities know everyone is in this together.

For Gate City Bank’s team members, making a difference in its communities is important all year long. In 2019, they volunteered almost 16,000 hours. Gate City Bank encourages team members to volunteer for organizations they are passionate about on company time. Furthermore, for each hour volunteered beyond 10 hours, Gate City Bank gifts a donation of approximately $25 per hour to the charity.

**Maintaining team member safety, resources and benefits**
Gate City Bank’s robust response to COVID-19 wouldn’t have been possible without its more than 770 team members who work out of 43 locations across North Dakota and central Minnesota.

The company’s main priority has always been the safety of its team members, as well as that of customers and community members. To promote safety and education around COVID-19, Gate City Bank created an additional intranet site that addresses sanitation best practices, the latest Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines and customer protection protocols. The site also features COVID-19-specific customer success stories, community involvement initiatives, tips for working from home and other helpful content.

Providing team members with the right resources during the COVID-19 pandemic has also been key. Gate City Bank made sure early on that as many team members as possible were able to work from home, implementing remote working capabilities such as video conferencing and flexible scheduling for those with kids learning from home.

Additionally, Gate City Bank has assured its team members that their pay and benefits will remain intact during this difficult time. With uncertainty at the top of most everyone’s mind, the organization took this approach to ensure team members don’t add financial worries to their daily concerns.

**Facing the challenge together**
As the world navigates COVID-19, Gate City Bank reminds people that it continues to be a safe and sound financial institution with strong capital, good earnings and a solid business continuity plan.

Gate City Bank has been essential in the lives of its customers, communities and team members for 97 years, and its goal is to continue serving as a stable and steadfast community partner in the years to come.

Durbin is the Executive Vice President of Data Strategies and Marketing at Gate City Bank. Visit their website for additional company information, gatecity.bank/

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Greater North Dakota Chamber 11
Who would have predicted that we would be where we are at today, dealing with COVID-19? We are all individually dealing with impacts from the pandemic but the Greater North Dakota Chamber remains focused on our mission of ensuring North Dakota retains the best business climate in the nation. We are focused on many issues including federal legislation, COVID-19 relief programs, unemployment insurance, supply chain disruptions/maintenance, and the economy – locally, nationally, and abroad. We also have an eye on the primary elections, occurring on June 9.

Crucial to our mission, is seeing business-friendly candidates elected into public office. The business community plays an important role in this process by being educated or aware of candidates on the ballot who impact industry and in tandem, North Dakota's economy. During this time of unrest, it is even more crucial to stay engaged in this process at the state and local level elections.

During this June's primary election, voters will be putting forward state candidates for the November general election. History shows that primary elections have low voter turnout because it is perceived their vote has minimal value. I ask you to keep in mind the pool of candidates that voters send to the general election, will include the elected officials that will be charged with assisting in restarting our state's economy. Unless a special session is called, we will not see the legislature back in session until January 2021. At which time, we will still be feeling ramifications and residuals from the virus and its impacts.

This year, North Dakota will have 72 legislative seats up for election, including the statewide seats of Governor, Treasurer, Insurance Commissioner, Auditor, Public Service Commissioner, and State School Superintendent.

Executive Orders 202013 and 202019, issued by Governor Burgum waives the mandate for physical voting locations and authorizes 100% voting by mail-in ballot. This will follow the absentee ballot process. In a time of social distancing, this provides North Dakotans with the ability to participate in the primary elections, while maintaining safety protocols.

Here are the steps North Dakota’s chief of elections official, the Secretary of State, will follow for the June 9 primary elections.

- Vote by mail applications will be sent out to every active and in-active North Dakota voter. These will need to be mailed back in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided. This can also be accomplished online www.vote.nd.gov
- Counties will mail out absentee ballots once applications are received by the North Dakota Secretary of State. Cities will include their ballots in with the County ballots.
- Mail-in ballots must be post marked on or before June 8th to be counted.

GNDC’s legislative scorecard, “How They Voted,” examines their voting record based on important pieces of legislation to the business community. The Greater North Dakota Chamber encourages business leaders to vote for Chamber Champions. State Legislators earn Chamber Champion status when they have a proven record of supporting free market principles and initiatives to improve the business climate of North Dakota. This can be done by voting for or against the recommendation of GNDC – who have evaluated the bill’s impacts on business to see if passing would produce positive or negative effects. These Chamber Champions help the Greater North Dakota Chamber meet our mission, in turn helping all North Dakotans. We do not know what the voting situation will be in November but it is essential that the right candidates are on the ballot to ensure recovery from COVID-19 be possible.
With an abundance of caution and care, we are doing everything we can to be ready to welcome guests to Medora this summer. We are all going to need a place to relax and restore ourselves and each other, so we are working to have Medora ready to be that place for people.

We are currently hiring for key positions so that when the dust settles, when it is allowable, and when folks are ready to travel and recreate again, we’ll be ready to help them experience the incredible and inspiring beauty of the Badlands – and for those who need it, to help rejuvenate their souls the way Theodore Roosevelt did here in 1884.

We understand COVID-19 is unlike anything most of us have ever seen, except for the most important way: we will recover.

Lead by our President, Randy Hatzenbuhler, and a very dedicated board of directors and staff, we have made it our commitment to focus on components of the issue that we can control, rather than to live in the crisis each day.

To be sure, we’re taking actions based on guidance from Governor Burgum, the CDC, Southwest District Health and others, making sure we are operating responsibly for our team and our community. We’re working on it constantly. Keeping the community and visitors safe is a key component to our daily effort – but that’s not all of it.

One of our core values says, “We work with creativity.” Each day, our team continues to find new ways to operate and is implementing better methods to help guests while improving efficiency. Like so many, we’ve been forced to use technology more than ever to stay connected, which, in the short and long term, is going to make us better. It’ll help us hire applicants, train new employees, document our core business processes and market Medora effectively.

What we’re starting to see and hone in on, is that this intense, refocusing period is producing three really important outcomes:

1) Creative, new ideas are coming forward that are going to make us even better at delivering a great Medora experience;

2) Simultaneously, our whole team is focusing intently on the parts of our organization that have the most impact and;

3) Maybe more than ever before, we are aligning behind our ‘why’ – to connect people to historic Medora for positive, life-changing experiences.

Right now isn’t easy for anyone. There’s a lot that we can’t control. But we know that we can do our best work for each other, for the state, and for the nation if we focus on solutions for what we can control. We plan to be ready to do what we do well, albeit maybe a little differently than we have done it before, and to use TR’s words as our guide to, “Do what we can, with what we have, where we are.”

We are keeping our eye on that. We’re planning to operate in the summer of 2020, using this experience to shape an even better version of the Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation to take care of families in Medora for the next 50 years and beyond.

Fisk is the Marketing and Communications Director at Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation. For more information and updates please visit their website at Medora.com.
Manufacturers have felt the pinch of the virus each in their own way dependent on their facility’s layout and their outputs. These pains are impacting production methods, supply chain management, and product distribution or need. We reached out to Dorothy Henke, founder of the famous Dot’s Pretzels to gain an industry perspective. Henke operates in Arizona, Kansas, and North Dakota.

**GNDC: What are the biggest challenges impacting Dot’s Pretzels in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

**Henke:** Keeping the plants safe and a sanitary environment are our top priorities. We are dealing with food. We cannot be too careful. We have added some safety measures by being creative.

Retailers not taking on new items. There are things we were working on that have been put on hold. Our marketing team is not having any in-person meetings, slowing new customer growth. The team is keeping in contact with current distributors and retailers by phone. As soon as we possibly can, they will get back to in-person meetings with new potential customers. Interestingly, our current customers have increased their orders. We know we are a comfort food. People are watching TV, playing board games, and doing other things as a family. Well they want comfort food while they do these things.

As a food manufacturer, what safety precautions has the company taken to ensure the safety of your workforce and outgoing product?

We have always taken cleanliness very seriously; this is a food product. We take it even more seriously now. Good hygiene has always been important in our plants, but we are reminding staff to, wash their hands repeatedly, keep social distance throughout the plants, wear masks, taking temperatures, and we have added additional cleaning every 2 hours in common areas and touch points like time clocks, door handles, break room, etc. Managers walk the plant floors and try to think outside of the box. From that we have come up with some creative solutions and we keep looking to make things safer for the employees. We constantly communicate across the plants asking for comments or ideas on efficiency while keeping things clean and safe for our employees and customers.

Are there any significant differences between North Dakota, Arizona, and Kansas in their response to COVID-19 regarding manufacturing?

Other than the layout of the plants, there is no real difference. The product is made the same way at all three plants. All new safety measures have been implemented at all three locations.

In what way has the disruption in the nations supply chain affected the company?

We have not had any real issues yet. Our supply person is constantly talking to our suppliers. We are probably ordering a little bit more than we usually do, just to assure we have an adequate supply on hand. He is doing a great job of planning ahead. If that means we must have a little more inventory, that is okay. We want keep up with the demand for our product.

What is the 3 month and 6 month outlook for Dot’s Pretzels?

We prepare for the worst, but plan for the best. Currently, we are looking forward to a successful 3 and 6 months, but there are too many unknowns to know for sure beyond that point.
I am very concerned about the economy and recession and the impact it will have on everyone. Shopping and buying decisions may change dramatically. If so, that could affect us.

**What will be the lasting effects that manufacturers will face post COVID-19 pandemic?**

It may impact the way shoppers shop. Consumers may look to order more items online.

New safety precautions that were implemented during this pandemic, could be the new norm as we move forward. Employees have asked if masks will always be mandatory. We have told them that we just don’t know yet. The additional equipment [PPE] is not very comfortable [to wear]. We hope that we won’t have to do that forever, but if we have to, we will adjust.

To order your own bag or read more on Dorothy’s story, check out her website, dotspretzels.com.

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**We are pleased to welcome these businesses to GNDC!**

Action Parcels and Storage LLC  
Bioscience Association of North Dakota  
Britton Transport Inc.  
CoJACK Snack & Pack  
Door Stud, LLC  
Environmental Services, Ltd.  
Fargo-Moorhead Area Association of REALTORS  
Fargo-Moorhead Builders Exchange, Inc.  
GAIN Coalition  
HealthPartners  
KFI Engineers  
Mead and Hunt  
MHA Systems  
North Dakota Concrete Council  
North Dakota Department of Transportation  
Oakview Consulting & Development  
Olson Effertz Lobbying & Consulting, LLC  
ProResources  
Southwest Mutual Insurance Company  
State of North Dakota Information Technology  
Terracon Consultants, Inc.
Located in Watford City, Wolf Pup Daycare has played a huge role in the community since October 2019. Currently licensed for 211 children with 17 classrooms, the daycare center is run by a Director/Operator with guidance from a board of directors.

When Governor Burgum cancelled school, they decided to close the learning center yet keep the daycare open. This helped meet social distancing guidance. Other guidance that impacted daily operations were extra hand washings and additional sanitization. The center started the week with 115 kids. By Wednesday, new rules and regulations imposed changed their business model – dropping classes down to 10 per room and developing a drop-off/pick-up regime. They met parents at the door – limiting internal social interactions and staff began washing children’s hands as they came in and before they left the facility. On March 23, services were closed except to children of essential life and safety workers.

“A couple of the challenges I am currently facing is that I had to lay-off a large percentage of my employees. There are only 3 full-time employees, and 2 part time employees currently working at Wolf Pup. Before Coronavirus, we had 78 employees. That has been a pretty hard hit for us,” stated Tessa Moberg, Daycare Director. “We submitted a PPP loan and a SBA loan, so hopefully that will come in and the employees will be able to benefit off of those.”

Wolf Pup furthered their services to the community by creating a caregiver list for distribution. Employees could have their name and contact info added to the list. Moberg stated this was important for everyone, “It is a win/win for both because the caregiver is still making a bit of money, and the parent can still go to work.”

In a world full of giggles, toothy grins, markers, crayons, and hugs, Moberg admitted she was struggling as many are, “It’s way too quiet. Going from 211 children to 9 children at most, has been a bit of an adjustment. I’m used to chaos and craziness all the time. I can’t wait for this virus to pass so everything can get back to normal. I miss all the kids so much.”

Information on Wolf Pup Daycare can be found at wolfpupdaycare.com

Editor’s note: Thank you to the daycares and their teams who are adjusting to this new normal. Already a heavily regulated industry, their work has had additional mandates and regulations added. Flexing to comply all while trying to work with/love on a population who may not understand or be scared of the world around them is not easy work. Your work is essential to the economy of North Dakota.
Keeping up with changing laws is a full-time job, and you’ve already got one.

EMPLOYERS AND LAWYERS, WORKING TOGETHER

Ogletree Deakins is one of the largest labor and employment law firms representing management in all types of employment-related legal matters. The firm has more than 900 lawyers located in 53 offices across the United States and in Europe, Canada, and Mexico.
It’s a new world these days. If you haven’t been on a conference call or webinar or haven’t “zoomed” in some fashion you have been hiding under a rock. A slow day may be 2 or 3 calls, meets, joins, or virtual events. I have two co-workers that can impersonate the sound of Microsoft Teams chimes like no other. Me, I’ve never been a fan of conference calls or webinars. It should not come as a surprise that GNDC’s Director of Membership would prefer to meet in person! However, when the phrase of year becomes social distancing it forces us all to embrace the technology of conference calls and webinars.

This technology has changed the way our remote state has worked since the pandemic began. As the pandemic set into North Dakota, business began to scramble. The amount of information out there was daunting and people didn’t know where to go or where to turn. To assist business, GNDC partnered with the ND Department of Commerce to provide weekly Business Briefing calls. The goal was to consolidate resources and give the North Dakota business community one place to get reliable information that would assist them in getting through these tough economic times.

Each organization worked separately to solidify the plan. GNDC took to registration and dissemination.

We have members from all corners of the state in all industries. It was a natural partnership for sharing information with the entire North Dakota business community. What happened next was great. Other associations and our local chambers of commerce shared the invitations and we had just shy of 1000 people, from all over North Dakota, from organizations large and small come together to hear a message of strength and resolve. The next week we a similar number and in the third week it jumped to almost 2300 members of the North Dakota business community.

This spoke volumes of what businesses needed – a trusted resource with the information that was needed.

Years ago, I was in a meeting with a business leader from out-of-state. He said that the reason he opened a location in North Dakota was because of how well the various branches of state government in North Dakota work together in tandem with the private sector.

These calls have evolved. Like other groups, we sort of clunked through the technology of the first call. North Dakota business leaders acquired information from state agencies, federal agencies, and advocacy groups who all had the goal of positioning North Dakota in the best spot for recovery. Our efforts worked, in a recent Bloomberg article, ND was second only to Nebraska for accessing SBA’s PPP Loans to cover 71% of eligible payrolls.

The interest from these calls and the questions that we started receiving from our members prompted us to begin looking for additional topics of need. These include interactive webinars with the US Chamber of Commerce, a two-part series on Employment Law with Ogletree Deakins, a presentation on best practices for finances/lending, and a Business Forum hosted with Senator John Hoeven attended by US Department of Labor Secretary Scalia.

We know that there are many resources out there and people are being invited to 9 million virtual sessions a day. We pride ourselves on providing the right resources to answer questions and help you develop your own strategies to move forward.

Our partnership is just one example of how North Dakotans are working together. These relationships are heart-warming as we wonder how our businesses, families and the economy will weather the COVID-19 storm. We will get through this. It may sound cliché, but I believe that this experience will make us all stronger.

In the meantime – I’m here for you via phone (701.222.0929), email (chris@ndchamber.com), or whatever technology you’d like. I’ll even edit my background to show you I’m at the beach...after I re-read that email that tells us how to do that.
THANK YOU

to all of the
healthcare workers and related staff
grocery store employees
truck drivers
teachers, educators, and staff
trash and recycling collectors
police, firefighters, and emergency services
gas station attendants
restaurant cooks and delivery drivers
postal workers
supply manufacturers and distributors
civic employees
volunteers
janitorial staff

and to everyone who gives their all tirelessly every day, whether at home or at work, so that we can get through these extraordinary times together.
Twenty nine counties and thousands of landowners have united to support wind energy developments benefitting schools, emergency responders, roads, veterans and so much more. Landowners are seeing how significant their lease payments have been in supporting their farm and ranch operation, making them more resilient for up to 25 years. Wind Energy has grown to 3,600 megawatts of electricity being produced throughout 29 North Dakota counties, offering some of the least expensive electricity rates in the country.

Landowners and County Officials encourage the Public Service Commission to support Wind Energy in North Dakota.