

# How can Utilities Help You?

**Utilities—including the members of the UEDA—have vast resources at their disposal to help you expand or relocate.**

The Utility Economic Development Association (UEDA) was formed to help economic developers at utility companies share knowledge and best practices with each other. Its members are drawn from investor-owned utilities across the country (as opposed to public power providers, or cooperatives).

Utilities are important potential partners for any site search you undertake. They often have expertise and resources available that complement or exceed what local community-sponsored economic developers can offer. Because utilities are limited in how they can grow (they can't simply expand their service territory at will), they rely on attracting new users of electricity and other energy sources into their territory and helping existing users to grow. Although there is a clear benefit to them to attract heavy power users, typically utilities are so integrated into their communities that they will gladly help any business that is interested in seeing whether it belongs there. Besides drawing up a comprehensive proposal of energy services and offering things like

power reliability history and other data, utilities often support local economic development organizations with comprehensive data books, training, and getting information on the Internet.

Twice a year, UEDA holds a forum where members learn about the latest trends in helping businesses grow and attend seminars to improve their skills. *Business Facilities* sponsored and attended the last meeting—the 2005 Winter Forum—held in Charleston, SC. We spoke with Nancy Norr, manager of community and economic development for Minnesota Power; and Ed Sitar, economic development manager for ComEd's External Affairs department, which serves northern Illinois. Nancy is UEDA's treasurer, and Ed is chair of the UEDA Executive Education Task Force.

**Business Facilities:** How do utilities benefit from UEDA?

Ed: One of the benefits I get out of UEDA is the opportunity to network with my industry peers. Our state economic development association doesn't really provide an opportunity to find out what other utilities are doing in terms of economic development, because it's mainly made up of community and state people.

**BF:** How are utilities focusing on economic development today?

Nancy: In Minnesota, we have tremendous potential for all sorts of projects, particularly in mining. But generally the kind of economic development we see in our region is trying to retain and grow what we have. We're still looking at firms that have an



Nancy Norr,  
Minnesota  
Power

affinity for the area, through either family ties or other interests. About 80% of what we do is retention, while 20% is focused on relocating companies.

**BF:** What kind of services should our readers expect from a utility?

**Ed:** I view it as giving an unbiased first entry into, in our case, Illinois. Utilities are just as active in economic development as states, and in some cases states have scaled back.

**Nancy:** The specific services offered vary by utility, but generally speaking we feel that we know our service areas better than anyone. On the local level the local developer may be more knowledgeable but we have the big picture. We offer assistance for site location, buildings, and sites, or even packaging for financial assistance, and will put them in touch with the right people. Obviously on the utility side we will

package the rate proposal, help with energy efficiency, etc. We can bring in the partners and build the team that addresses the needs of the business.

**BF:** Are there standards available that allow site selectors to compare the quality of power offered by utilities?

**Ed:** There are two industry standards called Customer Average Interruption Duration Index (CAIDI) and System Average Interruption Frequency Index (SAIFI). Those are things that are collected and reported usually to state utility commissions. The data is filed by each utility representing the numbers for their entire system. The problem with comparing this data across the country is that all utilities have different compositions of their service territory—some are very rural, others are very urban. Also, past outage history is really no indication of future outage history.

**Nancy:** One topic UEDA will be exploring heavily at our next forum in Portland, OR is power reliability. Speaking the language and helping customers understand the language, helping us do a better job of educating the industry customer and the location consultant, these are the goals. We want to create a common language and remove some of the barriers around the jargon and the acronyms. Reliability is often more important than price.

*For more about the UEDA conference or to read the full version of this article, please visit us online at [www.BusinessFacilities.com](http://www.BusinessFacilities.com).*

