Major national ethanol producers choose Sioux Falls

Merging ethanol producers VeraSun Energy and US BioEnergy have announced that the corporate offices of the combined company will be located in Sioux Falls. The announcement came following a thorough analysis of possible headquarters sites by senior leadership from both companies. VeraSun's headquarters has been in Brookings, SD, while US BioEnergy is based in St. Paul, MN.

“We recognize the vital role that the Brookings community has provided in supporting the early stage development of these two leading biofuels companies,” said Don Endres, VeraSun Chairman and CEO. “The primary objectives in determining a final location included the ability to retain and recruit an expanded workforce, the overall cost of doing business, proximity to our growing fleet of ethanol production facilities, access to travel and quality of life for our employees. When we evaluated all of the criteria, Sioux Falls emerged as the best location to meet our business objectives.”

The two companies announced plans to merge on November 29, 2007, giving the combined company a potential annual production capacity of more than 1.6 billion gallons by the end of 2008. Endres said that the selection of a corporate headquarters location is an important decision in closing the merger, allowing for the integration of resources and moving the firms closer to realizing the synergies and economies of scale they anticipate.

“With this merger, South Dakota is at the epicenter of the nation’s biofuels production,” said Governor Mike Rounds. “The realization by VeraSun and US BioEnergy that South Dakota is the best state in which to advance their science and grow their business sends an important message to similar companies across the US.”

The merger is expected to close, as previously announced, by the end of the first quarter of 2008, with the completion of the transition to the new headquarters targeted for the end of the summer.

“We are proud to have the kind of community and state that support our efforts to attract and retain businesses such as VeraSun and US BioEnergy,” said Mark Shlanta, chairman of the Sioux Falls Development Foundation. “With the headquarters of the nation’s two largest ethanol producers here in Sioux Falls, we can expect biotechnology to continue to be a large part of our future.”
Development Foundation chooses new executive committee

The newly elected executive committee of the Sioux Falls Development Foundation board of directors represents a wide variety of area businesses. Chosen to lead the economic development organization this year are, Mark Shlanta, Chair; Cathy Clark, Vice Chair; Jack Hopkins, Treasurer, and Steve Crim, Secretary, with Dana Dykhouse serving as Past Chair.

“This will be an interesting year for our organization,” Shlanta said. “As we select a new president and chart a new course for the future, we will be relying strongly on the experience and commitment of our executive committee and our entire board of directors.”

The SDN Communication board appointed Mark Shlanta CEO in July of 2000 after two years as the company’s Network Planning & Operations Director. Prior to joining SDN, Shlanta held various positions with Contel, GTE, Ameritech Cellular and Consolidated Communications. He draws on a background that includes degrees in mechanical engineering and engineering management from the University of Missouri-Rolla. Shlanta is a South Dakota native and is active in a number of volunteer activities throughout the community.

With over 25 years in the financial services industry, Cathy Clark is the Community Bank President of Wells Fargo. Born and raised in Cresco, Iowa, she attended Iowa State University where she majored in dairy science and ag business. Clark is Past Chair of Sioux Falls Area Chamber of Commerce and Dakotabilities, and has served on numerous boards and fund raising drives for nearly 25 years in Sioux Falls. Clark is currently a board member of Rotary West, Junior Achievement and Catholic Family Services and serves as treasurer of the Convention and Visitor's Bureau and the Sports Authority Boards.

Jack Hopkins is currently the President and CEO of CorTrust Bank, N.A., a $440 million family-owned, South Dakota based, independent community bank. He is a graduate of Artesian High School and the University of South Dakota in 1984. Hopkins has been in the banking industry for 22 years and with CorTrust Bank since February, 1988. His current activities include membership on the board of the Independent Community Bankers of America. He is a member of Sioux Falls Catholic Schools Foundation and has been involved with the Sioux Falls Area Chamber of Commerce, Sioux Vocational Services, Youth Enrichment Services, and is a past president of the Independent Community Bankers of South Dakota.

Steve Crim is a native of Estherville, Iowa, and a graduate of Mankato State University with a degree in Business Administration and Economics. After serving in Vietnam, Crim joined John Morrell & Co., starting in the beef division and is a 30-year veteran of Morrell. Crim had been the General Manager in Sioux Falls for 15 years until his retirement January 1, 2007.

Dana Dykhouse has served as President and Chief Executive Officer of First PREMIER Bank since March of 1995. He served as the chairman of the Sioux Empire United Way 2006-2007 Campaign and was co-chair of the Forward Sioux Falls V campaign. He is a member of the Sioux Empire United Way board, Downtown Rotary and is on the SDSU Division One Athletic Advisory Council. Dykhouse is also past chair of the SDSU Foundation Board, Sioux Empire Fair Association, Junior Achievement and the SD Bankers Association.

National search underway for new Development Foundation president

The board of directors of the Sioux Falls Development Foundation has retained Jorgenson Consulting, a national executive search firm with offices in Florida and Virginia, to conduct a national screening process to select a new president to replace retiring Dan Scott. Jorgenson Consulting works exclusively in the area of community and economic development recruiting. For over fifteen years, the company has assisted chambers of commerce and economic development organizations throughout the country in locating and hiring new executives.

“We have confidence that the Jorgenson team has the experience and the connections to secure excellent candidates for this position,” said Mark Shlanta, Development Foundation board chair. “They have established an aggressive timeline for the process and have been very attentive to the qualifications the board has outlined.”

The board plans to have a new president hired and welcomed to Sioux Falls before the end of June.
Breakfast briefings were held recently to kick off the 2008 edition of Interns in Industry, introducing the program to representatives of Sioux Falls area companies. Workforce Development Director Mary Medema led the sessions, held this year in the Forward Sioux Falls briefing center.

“This year we will offer up to 32 internship opportunities at nearly 20 companies,” Medema said. “In addition to companies like Precision Computer Systems and Showplace Kitchens which have participated regularly in the past, we have several potential new business partners. KDLT-TV, Poet, L.G. Everist and RAS Companies all have indicated their interest in bringing interns on this summer.”

The Interns in Industry program coordinates the screening of interns for regional businesses and offers a $500 scholarship to those students who complete their internships. Companies are provided with a short list of college students to interview for their internship opportunities based on students who have applied through the Interns in Industry program.

“Although we contact only about 10 regional educational institutions each year, we receive applications from students on nearly 20 campuses,” Medema said. “Students hear about the program from friends, parents or college websites. Last year, we had students from as far away as Chadron State in Nebraska, the University of Kansas and North Dakota State, in addition to our local and regional post-secondary institutions.”

The program has proven to be very popular with students and businesses, Medema said. The screening of interns helps companies find the best candidates—often leading to job offers made to the interns upon graduation—and students are able to go to a single source to explore a variety of internships available.

“The scholarship is a big plus,” Medema said, “but the success of Interns in Industry is based on placing the right student with the right company. That way, everybody wins—the community, the business and the student.”

For over fifty years, the Sioux Falls Development Foundation has been the leader for economic growth and development in our region. The stability and longevity of our organization is based on the participation of business leaders like you. During its half century of service, membership by the business community has insured the success—the very existence—of the Development Foundation.

Your membership in this vital group is as critical now as it was in 1954, when the first group of business leaders saw the importance of an organization devoted to planning and working for the future. Their membership created the Development Foundation—your membership will ensure its continued work.

If you have received your renewal notification, please send your check in right away. If you have received your first letter requesting your membership in the Development Foundation, please respond—we need your support.

And if you would like more information about membership or about the work of the Development Foundation to make the Sioux Falls area a better place to live and work—please call 339-0103, or e-mail Dan Hindbjorgen at danh@siouxfalls.com. Your participation will make a difference.
Growing up in rural South Dakota, Lyndon and Sheena Maas were familiar with Sioux Falls as the destination for shopping and entertainment. Sheena grew up on a farm near Platte, and Lyndon near Corsica. While both enjoyed the small town experience of attending high school in those communities, they looked forward to their outings in Sioux Falls.

“We loved going to Sioux Falls,” Sheena said. “We always had so much fun here—everything you want is here in Sioux Falls.”

The couple dated in high school and Sheena went off to college in Brookings. But when Lyndon started college at the University of Sioux Falls, she found herself spending more time here, and feeling more and more at home in Sioux Falls. So Sheena transferred to the Stewart School in Sioux Falls and, two years ago, the couple were married.

“Sioux Falls seemed like the best career city,” Sheena said. “We looked at some other communities, but they didn’t have the combination of big city amenities with a small town feel.”

Lyndon joined the Eide Bailley accounting firm and Sheena is now the office manager for Dakota Chiropractic. They couple built a home in western Sioux Falls a year ago and are enjoying being city residents.

“We are still close to our families,” Sheena said. “We go home on weekends for harvesting or hunting. But it’s so great to come back to Sioux Falls. There’s just so much going on here and there’s always something to do.”

The Maases see their future in Sioux Falls—a future that includes raising a family and growing with the community.

“We’re both confident that no matter what we want, we can get it here,” Sheena Maas said.

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Editor’s Note: Forward Sioux Falls is spotlighting young adults who have made the decision to pursue careers and their futures here. These professionals are representative of many others who have heard the Sioux Falls message and located here. Thanks to Forward Sioux Falls, young adults are finding opportunity in our community. Learn more at www.forwardsiouxfalls.com.

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Tom Simmons, Senior Vice President of Public Policy, Midcontinent Communications

W. Thomas Simmons joined Midcontinent Media, Inc., parent company of Midcontinent Communications, in 1987 as the general manager of Midcontinent’s South Dakota radio group. Simmons worked previously in radio broadcasting as an engineer, producer, announcer, operations manager and general manager. His total radio experience covered 25 years, 16 of which were in general management. In 1995, he joined Midco Communications, Midcontinent’s telecommunications company, as Vice President and General Manager and was given the primary task of leading the development of full service telephone and non-traditional communications services on Midcontinent’s cable television and broadband infrastructure. Simmons currently serves as Midcontinent’s Senior Vice President of Public Policy and manages the public affairs, public relations, government and industry relations and is the general spokesperson for the company.

In addition to his work activities, Simmons has been a board member of over twenty local charitable and civic organizations including CARDV, March of Dimes, American Heart Association, First Lutheran Church, Sioux Council Boy Scouts, Helpline Center, Sioux Falls Area Chamber of Commerce and Main Street Sioux Falls. He is involved in professional organizations including service as a board member or executive officer of four state broadcaster associations, past chair of the NAB Research Committee, and a board member of CompTel, the competitive telephone industries chief trade association. Simmons is a past recipient of South Dakota’s Broadcaster of the Year Award, and testifies often on industry issues before committees of the US Senate, US House, state legislatures and public utility commissions.
New opportunities await us in 2008

As we thank and congratulate Dan Scott for his years of service to the Development Foundation, we are also preparing for the next set of challenges and opportunities for our organization. Dan’s retirement makes it necessary to plan for the future, set new goals and strategize about new directions. As we conduct the search for Dan’s successor, we continue our discussions on the ways the Development Foundation can continue to be a vital force in the growth of Sioux Falls in a rapidly changing world.

You may have heard from a variety of news sources about the record year Sioux Falls had in 2007. While so much of the nation was reeling from falling housing starts and serious mortgage foreclosure statistics, Sioux Falls recorded a record in residential construction activity. Our foreclosure rate was about average for the past decade, and our total construction activity passed a half BILLION dollars in 2007. Our job growth, population increases and economic growth are all tracking with the steady, planned development which has characterized the past decade.

But economic development is more than just statistics—it is about people. People who live and work in the Sioux Falls area are showing their confidence in our combined future through consistent business growth and expansion. We know that the Development Foundation is part of that trend—and we’d like you to be a part of our organization by becoming a member. If you’re not already a member, please join us by calling 339-0103. If you are a member, please send your renewal check in soon—your participation is crucial to economic development in this region.

University Center student wins Spirit Scholarship

Kelsey Garry, a business management major at USD through the University Center, is one of two area students who received the 2007 Spirit of Sioux Falls Scholarship to continue their post-secondary business education. The $2,500 scholarships are awarded annually by the Sioux Falls Development Foundation to students who are Sioux Falls residents or who have completed at least one year of post-secondary work in South Dakota institutions.

Garry, who has been working since she was 15 years old, has been in an administrative position at the YWCA for over a year. Her goal is to become a manager at an organization similar to the YWCA and to remain in Sioux Falls. She is pursuing a business course of study to maintain the flexibility she needs for building a career.

“You can pretty much do anything with a business degree,” Garry said. “I’m really keeping my options open for whatever comes up in my future.”

The Sioux Falls Development Foundation is proud to be the sponsor of the Spirit of Sioux Falls scholarships and congratulates Kelsey on her achievement.
A great team can achieve great things

As I write this last column as president of the Sioux Falls Development Foundation, I can only think of all the people who have worked with me to make a difference in Sioux Falls and in our state. If there is one element that has made the past twenty years of economic development in Sioux Falls successful, that element is teamwork.

Simply put, I believe I’ve worked with the best, most dedicated people anywhere. The Development Foundation staff, every one of them, is world-class in their dedication to Sioux Falls and to this organization. They have raised cooperative spirit and commitment to their jobs to an art form. I could not have worked with a better group of people.

It has also been my good fortune to serve during a time when genuine community leaders have stepped forward to serve on the Development Foundation board of directors. We have always been privileged to attract people who care deeply about Sioux Falls and its future to be board members, and I have had a great advantage in working with those individuals.

Teamwork also extends to our city and state governments. We are blessed in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, with pro-business elected officials who share the goals of prosperity, job creation and quality of life excellence for our community and our state. Working with those government leaders has been a pleasure throughout my career in economic development.

As I retire from a position which has been challenging, uplifting and exciting, I can only express my appreciation for all of those people who have been part of the team. It’s been a great ride, and an effort we can all be proud of! My very best to all of you.