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NEWS

BNI Coal commissions new dragline, building on its nearly 100-year legacy as a premiere North Dakota energy producer

Center, North Dakota—BNI Coal, a subsidiary of ALLETE Inc., on Aug. 8 commissioned Legacy, a new 11-million-pound dragline that will keep the lignite Center Mine operating efficiently for years to come.

More than 100 people gathered for the event on the yard where Legacy is being assembled and painted. The commissioning was the culmination of a large project that began in April 2021 with the purchase of the dragline from Mississippi Power Co. Legacy arrived at the Center Mine as individual components that were disassembled into sizes small enough to be trucked from Mississippi to North Dakota. They were then reassembled onsite over the course of more than a year.

BNI contracted with Specialized Construction Services to disassemble and reassemble the dragline, which is nearly complete. The \$31 million project will replace an older dragline, Big Jake, that is being retired, and was more cost-effective than rebuilding the older dragline.

“The commissioning of Legacy builds on BNI’s nearly 100-year history in North Dakota as a large employer with a commitment to environmental stewardship,” said BNI General Manager Mike Heger. “What you see here is a \$31 million capital investment in the future of North Dakota’s lignite industry and our dedication to providing a reliable and affordable energy resource.”

Legacy joins Liberty, a similarly sized dragline that was put into service in 2004. The pair of draglines are the primary earth-movers at the mine, which reliably and affordably supplies lignite to Minnkota Power Cooperative’s nearby Milton R. Young Generating Station.

ALLETE Vice President and Corporate Treasurer Pat Cutshall said Legacy’s purchase and commissioning are important milestones for BNI Coal.

Cutshall said the 214 truck delivery trips necessary to move Legacy from Mississippi to North Dakota could have circled the globe 12 times, the entire project will take about 120,000 hours of work to complete, and Legacy’s bucket can hold 7,000 basketballs or about 32 million gummy bears.

He also said Legacy, which will operate on electricity taken directly from the local grid, is one of the world’s largest electric vehicles.

“This will sustain and enhance not only jobs, but also the local, regional and North Dakota economies,” Cutshall said, and praised the BNI team that is bringing the dragline project to a successful conclusion. “You should all be proud of yourselves.”

Also speaking at the event were Randy Christmann, North Dakota Public Service Commissioner; U.S. Rep. Kelly Armstrong; and U.S. Sen. Kevin Cramer. Cramer praised BNI’s land reclamation excellence, saying the prairie draws and woody areas BNI leaves behind are even more spectacular than the originals.

Heger then introduced third-generation BNI employee Kim Peterson, who submitted the name Legacy during BNI's naming contest, to break a bottle of champagne against Legacy's bucket, keeping a tradition that started with BNI's first dragline. Peterson's grandfather worked for BNI's predecessor company, Baukol-Noonan, at the Noonan Mine in Divide County, North Dakota, before the company moved operations to the Center Mine in Oliver County in 1970. Minnesota Power purchased Baukol-Noonan in 1988 and changed the company name to BNI Coal.

"I just thought of my family history with the mine, and the history of coal mining in the state, and Legacy just seemed to fit for me," Peterson said of coming up with the name.

Heger said Legacy replaces 45-year-old Big Jake, also a 757 Page model.

Some more fun facts about the new dragline:

- The boom is 310 feet long, with an operating radius of about 286 feet, so it can move dirt about 572 feet from one side to the other.
- It has a rated suspended load of 375,000 pounds.
- The tub on the bottom is about 65 feet in diameter.
- The house is about 105 feet long and about 80 feet wide.
- Legacy stands 286 feet tall, about 44 feet taller than North Dakota's state Capitol.

BNI Coal is a subsidiary of ALLETE, which is headquartered in Duluth, Minnesota.