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## MDI furthers investment in northern Minnesota with new, fully operational polypropylene extruder

### State-of-the-art extruder at Grand Rapids facility will create jobs, material for totes, trays and boxes

Plastics manufacturer MDI today announced that its brand-new, state-of-the-art polypropylene extruder – a machine used to create sheets that are converted in to custom and standard containers – is being installed at its Grand Rapids facility. These totes, trays and boxes are used in a wide range of industries including packaging, transportation, logistics, warehouse and medical. All products sold help provide jobs for people with and without disabilities.

The cutting-edge, \$3.2 million machine will allow MDI to produce up to five million sheets of material per year while creating an additional 75 new jobs across northern Minnesota over the next 10 years.

“While our new extruder will significantly improve our ability to provide a differentiated customer experience, the positive impacts of this extrusion line

go well beyond that,” said Eric Black, president and CEO of MDI. “Growth from this innovative technology will also allow MDI to create new employment opportunities and services for people with disabilities.”

The extruder creates sheets of material that will be sold to other businesses and used to make boxes, totes and trays. MDI previously sourced these sheets from other companies, which extended lead times and impacted competitiveness. MDI was able to purchase the machine thanks to generous grants from the Blandin Foundation and the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board (IRRRB).

About MDI: MDI is a trusted Minnesota manufacturer and nonprofit social enterprise with the mission to provide employment opportunities and services for people with disabilities. We create high-quality plastic containers to



**Pictured, are MDI employees, Greg Petersen, Todd Wirkkala, Colton Smith and Jon Frimunslund with the new polypropylene extruder.**

SUBMITTED PHOTO

ship, pack and store products, and offer unparalleled product assembly and packaging services for organiza-

tions across the country, from small businesses to Fortune 500 companies. By offering an inclusive workplace that allows

employees to build confidence, independence and purpose, MDI's work results in dedicated employees and satis-

fied customers. To learn more, visit [mdi.org](http://mdi.org).

PHOTO BY MARK SAUER  
**Fully electric excavating equipment was on display along side a wide range of cars and trucks.**



## New electric vehicle world

BY JIM ROMSAAS  
MESABI TRIBUNE

Electric vehicles may be the wave of the future, but there is still plenty to learn about them and making sure sufficient charging stations are in place.

Lake Country Power and several other electric cooperatives kept the ball rolling at last month's North Country EV Show & Tell Event in Duluth.

“The driving purpose behind it is education,” said Tami Zaun, LCP public relations coordinator. “We want potential future buyers, whether they're coop members or not, we just want consumers to be educated about electric vehicles.”

“Maybe it is the right investment for them or maybe they're not ready to jump in,” she added. “EVs are an option when you go to the dealership. Being an educated consumer is always a good thing.”

The event at Bayfront Park featured a discussion panel of EV industry experts, while several types of EVs were available to the public for viewing. That included models including the Ford F-150, Ford Mustang Mach-E, Tesla, hybrid trucks, work vans, an excavator Mean Green mower and more.

Even with the success of the EV event — held for the third time in the last four years — is the area ready to have a bunch of electric vehicles on the road?

“We're getting there,” Zaun said. “There are more (public) charging stations being put in.

Zaun pointed out that about 85% of a EV owner's charging happens at home. That is a big piece of the puzzle, LCP wants coop members to know. “If they do decide, we can make it easy for them,” she added, by

giving them a rebate on the electric vehicle charger itself. Also, “We've got an overnight program” on our off peak rate to save even more money due to a reduced electric rate. The overnight program runs from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. generally.

“A lot of these vehicles are very smart with the technology that's built into them,” Zaun said, to actually schedule what time you want your vehicle to start charging.

At the same time, “we realize in northern Minnesota we may be a little slower to get into the EV market than the people in the Twin Cities,” said Greg Schulzetenberg, LCP manager of community relations and marketing. “People do wonder about cold weather and how that's going to affect batteries. We're seeing that's a concern for people,” he said.

Plus there is “Range anxiety” of “having to travel so far in rural Minnesota. They're worried about running out of juice.”

While travel distance is a concern, Schulzetenberg said a lot of these batteries are being designed for the extremes and they are getting better every day.

He said the EV infrastructure, charging stations and availability of “some of these resources” remain big issues.

For a trip to the Twin Cities, for example, EV owners will have to find out where they have to charge up along the way. A map of charging stations can be found at [www.energywisemn.com/plugintomn](http://www.energywisemn.com/plugintomn) or on the PlugShare app.

Still, he said the majority will charge at home, drive to work and run errands during the day and will not exhaust their charge each day, **SEE ELECTRIC, PAGE 51**

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