

One Business

Energy Conservation Program



The Good Life Cafe

Winter 2017

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Molly Luther, Owner
The Good Life Cafe

The Good Life Cafe Serves Up Energy Efficiency

The city of Park Rapids, Minn., is a paradise for outdoor enthusiasts. Located near Itasca State Park, source of the Mississippi River, and surrounded by dozens of lakes and miles of recreational trails, the community thrives on tourism and northern hospitality. Residents and visitors alike place a high value on the region’s natural resources and the environment.

Molly Luther and her husband, Luke, both grew up in Park Rapids. While they left the area for college and spent time in Boston, Mass., the couple missed the good life of northern Minnesota. It wasn’t surprising when they returned home and opened a business called The Good Life Cafe on Main Street, Park Rapids, in 2009.

The Good Life Cafe is a popular destination, especially during the busy tourist season. Listed among the city’s top restaurants on TripAdvisor, it features modern American food with a twist. Along with burgers, sandwiches and other traditional fare, the menu includes local specialties, like walleye tacos and wild rice hotdish, plus gluten free, vegetarian and vegan options to suit contemporary tastes and lifestyles.

It all is served in a warm, welcoming atmosphere lit by energy-efficient LEDs and heated and cooled by an off-peak electric furnace and supplemental mini split air source heat

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Craig Kedrowski, Energy Efficiency Analyst—Lead
Minnesota Power

pump (ASHP). These choices sometimes go unnoticed, but they help curb costs and satisfy the business owners’ appetite for environmental responsibility, which is shared by many of their patrons and the broader community.

Minnesota Power’s Power of One® Business commercial conservation improvement program (CIP) has been a powerful resource in helping the small business recognize energy-saving opportunities and upgrade lighting and HVAC equipment over the years.

“We did not really have the foresight to think about energy efficiency when we first opened because the feat of constructing a new restaurant was all encompassing,” said Molly Luther, who became a strong advocate of energy-saving technologies after Minnesota Power conducted an energy analysis as part of a low-interest business loan application for a new entryway. “They recommended improvements such as a lighting retrofit; we have now replaced as many fixtures and bulbs as we can with LEDs and energy-efficient T8s.”



In addition to energy-efficient lighting, The Good Life Cafe has an off-peak electric furnace and a mini split air source heat pump for supplemental heating and cooling.

Luther was especially pleased that Minnesota Power energy consultants helped locate dimmable LEDs to replace the bulbs in two decorative fixtures that are central to the dining area's design and ambience.

"Lighting is very important in a restaurant. A lot goes into designing comfortable space, and the wrong lighting can ruin the look and feel," Luther said. "The bulbs in our centerpiece fixtures are exposed, so it was exciting to find dimmable LEDs that fit the design."

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Molly Luther, Owner
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Luther appreciates Minnesota Power's willingness to work with small businesses on energy conservation.

"Minnesota Power is a good partner for a business like ours" she said. "As a small business owner with a myriad of things to juggle, I also don't have time to research new energy-efficient products and technologies. Minnesota Power brings ideas and recommendations to us."



Minnesota Power's CIP team conducted an energy analysis and recommended a lighting redesign for The Good Life Cafe that included LEDs and other energy-efficient lighting upgrades.

Commercial energy conservation rebates from Minnesota Power made it easier for The Good Life Cafe to invest in LED lighting and in the wall-mounted mini split ASHP that helps keep the dining area comfortable.

"Rebates are enticing, especially on large purchases, like the mini split," Luther said. "We also got into LEDs early, when the price per bulb was pretty high, so we probably would not have done that without the rebates."

Park Rapids is a seasonal community, despite year-round recreational opportunities. According to Luther, The Good Life Cafe does 60 percent of its business in the summer.

"Restaurants and other businesses in our area really feel the crunch of a seasonal economy—margins are tight," Luther said. "Our long, cold winter has a huge impact on energy costs. Whatever we can do to save on heating and lighting in the off season helps us stay viable."

"Small businesses often operate on very tight budgets, and owners are busy," said Craig Kedrowski, energy efficiency analyst-lead, Minnesota Power. "We make it easy for business owners with limited time and resources to accomplish their energy-saving goals."

"Minnesota Power is always available for business customers of all sizes," said Tanuj Gulati, of Energy Insight, Inc., a Minnesota Power commercial energy consultant. "If a small business like The Good Life Cafe can benefit from our expertise prior to making decisions about lighting, HVAC, design or layout, we are there to help."



For more information:

Take the first steps toward managing energy use and costs at your business. Get started by filling out our free online pre-application at www.mnpower.com/BusinessPreApp

Learn more about Power of One® Business, Minnesota Power's commercial, agricultural and industrial energy conservation program by calling **218-355-2909** or visiting www.mnpower.com/OneBusiness