

Watford City continues to expand in the Bakken

Last month the town of Watford City experienced the completion of yet another construction project. In addition



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For Bakken Breakout Weekly

to being located in the Bakken, Watford City is in the heart of the hot zone of oil and gas activity.

The project referred to earlier is The Rough Rider Center, a municipal event and recreation center, which was constructed by Kraus-Anderson Construction Company, one of the Midwest's oldest and largest commercial general contractors and construction managers.

"The company has been around for over 100 years," said Chad Larson of Kraus-Anderson.

Kraus-Anderson Construction Company, is headquartered in Minneapolis, Minn. and has regional offices in Madison, Wis., Bismarck, N.D., and Duluth, Bemidji and Rochester Minn. Larson has been working in the Bakken for over the past year, while his family lives in the Minneapolis area.

"I've been out there pretty much full time for the past year," Larson said. "We finished a brand new high school project last year, and it opened the following February. Now we finished a 269,000 square-foot event center."

According to the project's press release, the two-story, \$101 million Rough Rider Center features a competition swimming pool and waterpark; 22,000-square-foot multi-use field house with three basketball courts and removable artificial turf; 1,000-seat hockey arena and separate practice hockey rink; 3,000-seat arena for sporting events and concerts with eight executive suites; 12,000-square-foot gymnastics club; and 10,000 square feet of convention space, as well as a continuous elevated running track.

"It is all connected to the existing high school we just built," Larson said. "Well actually the event center and high school will be separated by 80 feet, but are connected by an underground tunnel."

The project also includes a new artificial turf football stadium with track, artificial turf baseball field, parking lots, conference rooms and administrative offices.

The Rough Rider Center also will be used by various community groups as well as by the Watford City High School. The new 160,000-square-foot high school is adjacent to the event center. The Watford City High School project was a joint venture of Kraus-Anderson and Construction Engineers.

"We were awarded the Watford City event center and high school project in 2014 and it was kinda our first large project we were awarded in the Bakken," Larson said. "Since then we've picked up some other school work and projects in the Bakken area. We are currently finishing up another school addition in Alexander too."

Larson specified even further with project activity.

"We've seen work in Minot and Bismarck," Larson said. "After the Minot floods we did all the school work there for the school district. We rebuilt five of the schools that they had, which are finishing up right now too."

Larson said their North Dakota work the past five years has been steady and sees the slowdown as a good opportunity for communities to get caught up on local projects and infrastructure needs.

However, Larson had spent the past couple of years in the hot zone of the Bakken's oil and gas activity. His perception of oil activity is much different than the average person.

"When we first came to town, during the pre-planning stages, there were traffic jams and driving around was just difficult," Larson said. "To get across town, a town of a few thousand people, it would take you a half and hour with all the traffic."

Since then a number of upgrades have been completed to help alleviate traffic congestion and vehicle claustrophobia.

"The past two years have been amazing," Larson said. "They've opened the by-pass around Watford City, all the new city streets and all the other infrastructure has made it much more enjoyable."

Before working full time in Watford City, Larson had been there many times to visit family. Larson felt like he understood more about the average person living there than other full time Bakken nomadic workers.

In fact Larson said when the oil activity was bustling along at \$100, he felt sorry for the people who lived there.

"When we first moved out there, I felt sorry for the people living there," Larson said. "It used to be a typical small town in western North Dakota."

Larson still marvels at the traffic be-



Photos credit: Photos courtesy of Kraus-Anderson Construction Company.

tween Williston and Watford City.

"The first time I went out there for this project I could not believe the amount of traffic between Williston and Watford City," Larson said.

"How it would take you two hours to get from Williston and Watford City, which is a 40-mile drive."

He said overall he is happy the residents and locals who have braved the construction and seen the projects come to fruition.

"I really did feel bad for the people who had to put up with all the construction and energy activity, but it is great now that they have stuck it out," Larson

said. "Now they have these fabulous facilities as a part of their community."



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