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In our world of fast, automated, and advanced technology, we are often far more focused on the “next big thing” instead of what makes it all possible. Indeed, behind NASA's supercomputers, Apple's latest iPhone, and the Da Vinci Surgical Robot are municipal utilities. Without the electricity to run our machines, clean water to drink, and power to heat our homes, our world wouldn't feature any of these high-tech advancements. As such, those who provide municipal utility services are owed a big thank you for providing the foundation through which our society operates.

In my hometown of Elk River, I have Elk River Municipal Utilities (ERMU) to thank. ERMU officially began in 1920 when businessman Fred Waterman began building a hydroelectric power plant to provide modern utilities to the small town of Elk River. This was the starting point of ERMU's long history of providing affordable utilities to our city. Indeed, with its 12,300 customers, ERMU continues to supply my community with the power and water that runs our everyday lives. Without the establishment of these utilities, Elk River may never have expanded to become the prosperous, substantial city it is today.

Not only does Elk River Municipal Utilities provide the vital services that run our schools, businesses, and infrastructure, but they do so in the right way. By having a consumer-owned business model and governing body of community members, ERMU provides these services with consideration of the specific needs and lifestyles of its customers. Our community is privileged to have affordable, quality, and reliable electricity and water governed by those we can trust. Additionally, ERMU is one of the 70 public power utility companies in the country to earn the Smart Energy Provider designation—a designation given to institutions that commit to providing energy in a smart, efficient, and sustainable manner. Moreover, by considering the environment, ERMU provides essential services while doing its part to contribute to the reduction of carbon emissions and environmental harm.

Finally, another major upside of having a community-run utility organization like ERMU is its direct and timely response to the community. For example, during the COVID-19

pandemic, our dependence on electrical and water utilities was higher than ever before. ERMU recognized this community need, and responded by ensuring its vital services were always available to support students and families during distance learning. Additionally, with the frigid winters Minnesota is well known for, it is comforting to know our utilities are always being adapted to best fit our community's specific needs. As utilities become all the more common and expected, the importance of these things is easy to overlook. Nonetheless, that does not mean they should be underappreciated. By providing quality, low-cost, and reliable services, ERMU is the lifeblood of our high-tech lifestyles.

Municipal Utilities provides a foundation for the advancements that make our lives comfortable, efficient, and manageable. From vacuum cleaners to microwaves and everything in between, we can thank utilities for drastically improving our home lives by providing electricity. Also, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately 77% of all jobs in the United States require the use of a computer. Indeed, not only do utilities support our home lives, but their services also fuel our jobs, schools, and businesses.

As someone interested in biomedical engineering, I have become especially thankful for these services, as my career interest revolves entirely around the electricity that supports the development of tomorrow's medical technology. By providing the clean water that allows my family to drink, cook, and clean, and the electricity that allows me to pursue my interest in building and wiring desktop computers, municipal utilities have connections to nearly every part of my life—and the lives of our community members.

Overall, when we really stop to think about it, municipal utilities are the backbone of our society and everyday lives. Municipal utilities aren't just good for all of us, they are vital to our lifestyles, and they continue to support nearly every aspect of our modern society.