

Chapter 20

## What the Future Holds

*What is past is prologue.*

In these five words of his carved in granite at the entrance to the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C., William Shakespeare captured the essence of the study of any people, nation or institution. Certainly, they apply to the Modesto Irrigation District as it enters its second century of operation.

The experiences, the struggles and the achievements of the past are the foundation upon which the future will be built.

The MID, conceived in the dream of greening an area already known as Paradise Valley and maturing through the battles of its infancy and its formative years, has become a strong, vital force in the economic structure and well-being of the Modesto community. It should continue to be so in the years ahead.

This institution did not just appear suddenly. It was born out of the dedication, courage and faith of strong-minded men and women – not only the McHenrys, the Beards, the Carvers, the Woottens, the Cresseys and others mentioned specifically, but also a great many people in all walks of life who worked together in contributing their labors to turn the dream into reality.

But what of the future?

Gazing into a crystal ball is an extremely speculative thing at best.

Looking back 100 years, who among the visionary organizers of the Modesto Irrigation District could have dreamed that their district would become one of the nation's most efficiently operated electric utilities with an annual budget in excess of \$115 million and a total capital investment of more than \$526 million?

The nation's first electrical generating plant was put in operation only eight years before the Modesto district was formed. Who could have dreamed that some day electricity would be generated by oil, coal, nuclear, geothermal and wind power as well as falling water and transmitted thousands of miles?

Who among the founders could have dreamed their district would operate one of California's finest recreation areas around a lake which is almost as long as the distance from Modesto to La Grange?

Could any of those progressive farmers who fought so hard to bring water to their lands have thought that some day the MID would be serving more urban homes, businesses and industries than farms?

And those farsighted people who dreamed of turning Paradise Valley into a true agricultural paradise, could they have envisioned an agricultural economy returning two-thirds of a billion dollars to Stanislaus County annually from dairy products, poultry, peaches, walnuts, tomatoes, turkeys, almonds, rice, field crops and other commodities?

Thus, it is doubtful, even with today's computerized technology, our professional planners and all the data banks they can tap, that we can forecast exactly what will happen between now and the year 2087.

Still, it's always fascinating to try.

In exploring the future with many persons closely associated with the MID at present and in the past, one common thread prevails. By 2087 the central corridor from Turlock through Ceres and Modesto to Salida will be one large metropolitan area receiving its domestic and industrial water from existing irrigation districts.

Another common thread holds that the stability of the Modesto Irrigation District will keep it firmly in the water and power business for another century or more.

These forecasters do not agree, however, as to the nature of the district.

Some say the MID will maintain its independence. Others foresee that there will be only one public utility district serving the entire area from the foothills on the east to the San Joaquin River on the west, from the Stanislaus River to the Merced River. The Modesto, Turlock and Oakdale Irrigation Districts, in this view, would be forced to unite as a single entity in order to achieve maximum efficiency, survive the pressures of centralized state and federal governments, protect their water rights and fend off the appetites of private utilities.

Whether it will be an enlarged district or an independent MID serving within its current boundaries, there is little question that this agency will be the purveyor of all water, domestic and agricultural. Primary consumption will be domestic water as agriculture will be forced by urbanization to retreat to more remote areas. Crystalball gazers disagree, however, on whether the district will wholesale domestic water to distribution agencies or will be the distributor as well as the source of supply.

Additional storage facilities will be required to meet irrigation needs as the volume of water used for domestic purposes exceeds that used for agriculture.

The operation of the irrigation distribution system and all domestic water services will be automated. Water deliveries, whether domestic or agricultural, will be metered automatically and the price based on the actual cost of service. Ditchtenders will be a thing of the past.

Canals and laterals throughout the system below the Modesto Reservoir will be piped, and possibly even the upper main canal will be placed underground. Their landscaped rights-of-ways will be accessible to the public for jogging, bicycling and recreational pursuits.

Flood irrigation undoubtedly will give way to sprinkler, drip or other methods which use smaller amounts of water. This transition will allow expansion of irrigation to the foothills where lands will be placed under more intensive cultivation. Others forecast the switch to row crops in the Valley, farmed in a manufacturing-type setting of hydroponic hothouses. In any case, conservation of agricultural water will be enforced.

Anticipating a major fight over water rights and control of the Tuolumne River watershed, some observers fear the district will be left only nominal control. They see the State of California attempting to monitor and distribute the waters of the Tuolumne and all other watersheds in the state. They see the State of California attempting to monitor and distribute the waters of the Tuolumne and all other watersheds in the state. They wonder if 100 years from now, a statewide master plan might control the amounts of water consumed and the distribution of surpluses to areas more arid than Stanislaus County.

Others, looking to the fierce independence of the district throughout its first century, contend it will successfully ward off future intrusions by state and federal agencies as it has in the past.

Although current pressures appear to be minimizing the value of individual water rights, some believe these rights in the Modesto Irrigation District, where the land owns the water, will become more valuable than the land itself.

With the completion of transmission lines to the Pacific Northwest, Canada and the Pacific Southwest, electrical operations will continue in much the same manner as today, but with great technological refinements. Much of California's energy will be generated by hydroelectric plants in Canada. Modesto's central location in the intertie system, will make the MID a major force in the distribution of wholesale power throughout Central California.

The increased use of sophisticated computers will result in innovative rate structures which will encourage off-peak use, with peak use monitored carefully for maximum efficiency. Meter reading will be done by remote control. Traditional meter readers will go the way of the ditchtenders.

Anticipating that the use of fossil fuels for the generation of electricity will become a thing of the past – prohibitive in cost and prohibited to maintain air quality – new sources of energy will be developed. Scientists today dream of satellite power stations generating solar energy and of power harnessed from ocean tides. Before the MID completes its second century there will be even more exotic sources of energy not even mentioned in today's wildest science-fiction tales.

Among the innovations in the electrical field foreseen are such "off the wall" concepts as the transmission of power without the use of wires. This would open up whole new horizons.

It is expected, however, that the Modesto Irrigation District will continue to keep pace, as it has in the past and must do if it is to survive.

This possibly will be achieved through a consortium of independent public-power agencies. Failure to keep pace could result only in the independent district being swallowed up by private enterprise, to operate merely as working divisions of a great corporation.

Politically, there will be changes, according to those looking into the future.

Coalitions of special-interest groups will seek to elect their own representatives and gain control of the MID Board of Directors. At the same time, limits may be imposed on the length of tenure on the board, possibly four terms. Women will become more active not only as elected directors but also will be visible as top engineering and management executives.

One forecaster says increased interest in district activities will force the board to alternate its meetings between afternoons and evenings to permit greater public participation. These meetings will be broadcast over cable television.

Such are the complexities which will face the Modesto Irrigation District Boards of Directors and staff during the next century.

A keen sense of identity with the pioneering spirit of those believers and builders that nurtured the irrigation district into existence has motivated the district's leaders and inspired its family of employees over the first 100 years.

This cooperative spirit and loyalty are easily discernable in the long service of many "MID" people. Most top management officials have grown up with the district, experiencing and responding to the types of challenges that moved its early leaders to success.

For instance, during its first century only five people served as secretary to the board and to the district. W. W. Granger, appointed in 1888, was succeeded at the turn of the century by C. S. Abbott who held the post until his death in 1940. Larry E. Bither next was secretary. When George R. Stoddard, who had been MID treasurer since 1894, retired in 1943, Bither became secretary-treasurer. He filled both posts until his retirement in 1959. When his successor, H. L. "Les" Brooks became chief executive officer in 1980, Joan Wishon was named district secretary, a position she holds today.

Brooks, retiring this year, started work with the district 41 years ago as a surveyor's assistant. He soon became assistant to Secretary-Treasurer Bither. Through their close association with the district's board of directors, both Bither and Brooks played significant roles in the development of non-engineering administrative and management programs during the years that the senior MID executive was the chief engineer. Brooks became the first non-engineer named as chief executive officer.

Among the engineers, Charles Crawford first went to work for the district in 1928. For many years the district's irrigation engineer, Crawford was New Don Pedro Project coordinator for the MID, TID and City of San Francisco when he retired a year ago. He still works at least one day a week on a voluntary basis.

The late Clifford Plummer served the district for 30 years before his 1966 retirement. He became the district's first chief engineer with the consolidation of electrical and irrigation functions under a single

head in 1943. In this capacity he guided much of the district's mid-century irrigation and electrical expansion.

His successors were engineers who moved up through the electrical department. Jess Grigsby started working for the MID in 1925 stenciling power poles on Saturdays while he was in high school. He became a full-time draftsman in 1930 and was chief engineer from 1966 to 1972. Mervin N. Bennett, who became the district's first chief administrative officer, had been with the district for nearly 40 years, including eight as its top executive, before retiring in 1980. Charles S. Viss, who retires this year as assistant general manager for power resources, joined the MID electric meter department in 1954.

Employees with records of 25 or more years of service are not uncommon. Pride in service and workmanship is a standard reflected by MID employees. Their long service records and job dedication strengthens the insituation and benefits MID power consumers.

But what is the prospect of these foundations of commitment to public service? If much of the district's strength rests upon the motivation and stability of its employees, what will be the impact of this highly mobile age of specialization and high technology?

Most MID observers believe it will be minimal. The district has survived greater risks, challenges and crisis.

The great majority of the district's more than 300 employees will continue to be local residents with strong loyalty to the district and the community. Specialists brought in from other areas generally elect to stay rather than move onto larger cities.

Furthermore, the Modesto Irrigation District is a public agency with an elected governing board. Directors will continue to be established farmers, businesspeople and community leaders with strong commitments to the region providing a continuity of service to sustain the traditions of the Modesto Irrigation District.

Directors holding office as the district begins its second 100 years typify the individuals who have led and are expected to continue to lead the district:

*Robert A. Beck, DVM, Division 1.* First elected in 1979, Dr. Beck represents the southeast area of the district, including Empire and Waterford. A retired veterinarian, Dr. Beck has farmed extensively a

variety of crops, including rice. Currently, he is devoting all of his time to the irrigation district and other community activities. He is President of the MID Board of Directors in its centennial year.

*Charles Billington, Division 2.* Taking office in December 1985, Billington represents the central Modesto area. He is the owner of a metal fabrication and related products company specializing in food processing, auto racing and steel supply products. Billington is active in community, professional and athletic associations.

*Jeffrey P. Cowan, Division 3.* Representing the northeastern section of the district since 1981, Cowan is president and general manager of a local floor covering company. The family business was started here in 1950 by his father. A long-time resident of Modesto, he is active in community and professional organizations.

*William Lyons, Jr., Division 4.* Taking office in December, 1985, Lyons represents the northwest and Salida area. A Modesto native, Lyons manages diversified farming cattle and agribusiness investment operations. Lyons is a leader in Stanislaus county cattle, professional and community organizations.

*John E. Kidd, Division 5.* A lifelong resident of the area, Kidd has represented the southwest area since 1971. He has served as president of the statewide Association of California Water Agencies. Operator of a registered Holstein dairy, he is active in agricultural and community affairs.

These are the men who face the decisions about power resources and energy transmission, domestic water delivery and other matters of concern in the immediate future.

Through a vision and determination comparable to that exhibited in 1887 by the MID's founders, directors serving as the second century opens are working to meet the immediate challenges of the next 15 to 25 years while wondering what lies ahead beyond that.

The first 100 years of the Modesto Irrigation District were full of challenges and excitement. The events of the next century will be just as dynamic and demanding.