



The small city of stacks that make up Flint Hills Refinery have become a familiar sight over the past 50 years to those who travel through Rosemount on Highway 52. The refinery has spent the past five decades producing fuel and other products that are shipped throughout the upper Midwest and beyond.

Flint Hills Refinery celebrates 50 years in Rosemount

By JEFF MORES
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There are a few landmarks anyone who lives in or has passed through Rosemount is familiar with.

There's the old Fluegel's grain elevator, which looks

down over the downtown area and is among the oldest structures in the area. The old St. Joseph's Church steeple, which stands along the west side of South

Robert Trail, serves as a familiar landmark and a connection to Rosemount's past. And one can't forget to mention the strange arrangement of concrete

walls and stacks that seemingly rise out of nowhere along the eastern stretch of County Road 46. Those are the remains of the once mighty Gopher Ordnance

Plant, which produced gun powder for the United States military.

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But there's one familiar landmark that's grown considerably over the years and is located on the eastern fringe of the Rosemount community. That landmark is the Flint Hills Refinery, with its many stacks lining the skyline along the western side of Highway 52.

September marks the 50th anniversary of the refinery's birth in Rosemount. The refinery operates around the clock and draws the attention of passing motorists, but it has changed considerably over the past five decades. It remains as important a piece of the community and supplier to the Upper Midwest and beyond as ever before. And, given the recent focus on escalating fuel prices and the country's increasing dependence on gasoline, Flint Hills Refinery is as significant an operation as it has ever been.

In the beginning

In 1951, the Great Northern Oil Company formed for the purpose of constructing a refinery near St. Paul. The discovery of crude oil in Canada in 1952 made it even more important to construct a refinery in the Twin Cities area. In 1954, the Rosemount Town Board voted unanimously to issue a building permit for the construction of the operation, which was then referred to as Pine Bend Refinery.

Later that same year, a groundbreaking ceremony was held at the 97-acre site and, by June 1955, crude oil from Fosterton, Saskatchewan began moving south

via a specially installed pipeline. By late September 1955, the refinery went online and began operation.

Evolving through the years

In those beginning days, the Rosemount refinery had the capacity to produce 25,000 barrels per day, more than doubling the state's previous refining production. By the 1970s, that capacity had been raised to 85,000-110,000 barrels per day, and by the time the 1990s rolled around, the refinery was producing about 200,000 barrels per day. Today, the refinery, which was renamed Flint Hills a few years ago, has the capacity to produce up to 280,000 barrels per day.

The need is certainly there to demand that level of production.

According to the Minnesota Department of Transportation, in 1955, there were 11.5 million vehicle miles traveled on Minnesota roads was 11.5 million miles. In 2003, that number was up to 55.2 million miles. That number continues to rise.

In addition, MnDOT records indicate motor vehicle registrations for automobiles in Minnesota increased from approximately 1.1 million in 1955 to 2.5 million in 2003.

All of this translates into the need for more refinery production. Flint Hills Refinery in Rosemount is the largest of the state's three oil refineries. The refinery produces quite a range of products, including gasoline, diesel fuel, jet fuel,

asphalt, propane, elemental sulfur, food grade carbon dioxide and petroleum coke, which is mixed with coal by electric utilities to produce electricity.

Anyone who has been at a pump at a Holiday gas station in recent years has probably noticed the Blue Planet brand of gasoline, which is advertised as a more environmentally friendly fuel option. Flint Hills created Blue Planet gasoline, a low sulfur gasoline that reduces emissions, in 1999. The product was introduced six years ahead of the EPA's new maximum sulfur standard for gasoline.

Supplying the Upper Midwest

The transportation fuels, such as gasoline, diesel and jet fuel, produced at Flint Hills are shipped mainly to Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa and some parts of North Dakota and South Dakota. The refinery's petroleum coke, elemental sulfur and asphalt are distributed to an even wider range of states.

Today, there are approximately 800 employees at Flint Hills. Because of the size of the operation, questions have always circulated regarding air quality in the area surrounding the refinery. Standards have changed considerably through the years and Flint Hills has made a strong effort to not only meet but exceed the standards set in recent years.

Through the years

- 1951 – Great Northern Oil Company formed for the purpose of constructing a refinery near St. Paul
- 1952 – Discovery of oil near Fosterton, Saskatchewan eventually leads to the building of the Great Northern Oil refinery
- 1954 – Rosemount Town Board vote unanimously to issue a building permit for construction of the Pine Bend refinery
- 1954 – In April, groundbreaking begins on 970 acres of farmland in Pine Bend
- 1955 – In June, crude oil from Fosterton, Saskatchewan begins moving south via pipeline
- 1955 – In late September, the refinery goes on line and begins operating. The Pine Bend refinery has a capacity of 25,000 barrels per day, more than doubling the state's previous refining production. It is the largest of the state's three refineries and cost \$26 million to construct.
- 1956 – The refinery has 225 employees
- 1959 – Fred Koch, founder of Koch Industries, buys a interest in Great Northern Oil Company
- 1969 – Koch Industries has majority ownership in Great Northern Oil Company
- 1972 – Great Northern Oil Company renamed Koch Refining Company
- 1999 – Koch Refining Company was renamed Koch Petroleum Group
- 2002 – Koch Petroleum Group was renamed Flint Hills Resources, which is an independent subsidiary of Koch Industries.

At the end of 2004, Flint Hills achieved its goal of reducing emissions by 50 percent in five years. This pledge was made in 1999. The effort turned the refinery into one of the cleanest in the country. During that period, the refinery reduced flaring, the flame that can sometimes be seen coming from refinery stacks, by 95 percent. Flint Hills received a Clean Air Award in 2004 from the Environmental Protection Agency for its reductions in flaring.

In the community

Over the years Flint Hills has also attempted to establish itself as a good neighbor. The refinery has donated money for parks and trails in surrounding communities. The refinery also supports the Minnesota Zoo and has sponsored scholarships for more than 240 graduating seniors, totalling more than \$450,000. Engineers from the refinery have worked with local high schools and the list of other ways Flint Hills has reached out locally goes on and on.