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**For Immediate Release**

**Contact:** Mary Howell, 804-968-4070 ([mhowell@vmdaec.com](mailto:mhowell@vmdaec.com))

## **Virginia's electric cooperatives recognized at 'Hire Education' Conference**

**Glen Allen, Va.** — Virginia's electric cooperatives were honored at the Virginia Community College System's Hire Education Conference, held in early December in Hot Springs.

The cooperatives' statewide trade association, as well as two local electric-distribution cooperatives, received the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in the area of Outstanding Achievement by a Collaboration or Consortium.

John C. Lee, Jr., president and CEO of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative, accepted the Chancellor's Awards on behalf of Virginia's electric cooperatives at the conference.

With Lee, Southside Electric Cooperative President and CEO Jeff Edwards and Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives President and CEO Richard Johnstone were also honored with Chancellor's Awards.

The conference is an annual gathering of community college leaders, workforce-development professionals, partner agencies, board members and elected officials, to explore ways to meet workforce needs in the Commonwealth, and to position Virginia as a national model for workforce training.

Virginia's electric cooperatives have been instrumental in creating and sustaining the Power Line Worker Training School, a part of Southside Virginia Community College that was established in 2016. The school was created through a collaborative effort by a variety of agencies and organizations, including Virginia's consumer-owned electric cooperatives.

A 2015 grant from the Virginia Community College System's Equipment Trust Fund provided seed money to begin planning the Power Line Worker Training School at Southside Virginia Community College's Occupational/Technical Training Center, located at Pickett Park, site of former U.S. Army base Fort Pickett near Blackstone.

And the Power Line Worker Training Program was one of five successful entries in the first Governor's Competition for Talent Solutions, announced in the fall of 2015. The school benefited from a \$200,000 matching incentive grant intended to provide new workforce training options and develop the state's rural economy as part of the Rural Virginia Horseshoe Initiative.

To these grants, Virginia's electric cooperatives contributed additional funding, material and expertise

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to get the school started. The school went from concept to class in less than 12 months. The first class graduated in May 2016. The school marked its sixth graduation ceremony in November.

In accepting the award from Dr. Glenn Dubois, chancellor of Virginia's Community Colleges, Lee said, "I am deeply honored to represent Virginia's 13 electric cooperatives here tonight. Virginia's member-owned electric cooperatives have both a long history, and very deep roots, in the communities we serve across the rural areas and small towns of Virginia. And while our mission is to deliver reliable, affordable electricity to the 550,000 homes, farms and businesses we serve, our passion is to improve the quality of life in those communities. We do so by attracting new businesses and retaining existing ones; by enhancing our public school systems; by supporting first responders; and by aggressively advocating educational programs that provide our young people quality employment opportunities that will allow them to live and work close to home and family.

"More than anything, ladies and gentlemen, the Power Line Worker Training School is an excellent example of the magical things that can happen when public entities and private companies join together in common cause, and help local communities, help young people, and in this case, help both.

"We greatly appreciate you honoring Virginia's electric cooperatives with the 2017 Chancellor's Award. With an 80-year history that includes many, many proud moments, I can assure you that this honor ranks as one of the best yet for Virginia's member-owned electric cooperatives. Thank you again!"

Founded in 1944, VMDAEC is the trade association for 15 customer-owned, not-for-profit electric distribution cooperatives that serve Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. The Glen Allen, Va.-based Association provides its member cooperatives with employee and director education, safety training, government relations, and communications services, including publishing *Cooperative Living* magazine. For more information, visit [www.vmdaec.com](http://www.vmdaec.com) or [www.co-opliving.com](http://www.co-opliving.com).



**Photo caption:** Dr. Glenn Dubois (right), chancellor of Virginia's Community Colleges, presents Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative CEO John Lee with a Chancellor's Award for Excellence in the area of Outstanding Achievement by a Collaboration of Consortium. Lee accepted the award on behalf of Virginia's electric cooperatives.