

March 21, 2019

## Showcasing Line Workers

### Lace Up the Boots! Gaff-N-Go to the Rodeo on May 10-11

Listen, and soon you'll hear the familiar sounds of spring: the chirp of a bird, the crack of a baseball bat and the clang of an electric utility line worker strapping on gear for the annual **Gaff-n-Go Lineman's Rodeo**.



*A view of the event field at last year's Gaff-n-Go Rodeo.*

The 17<sup>th</sup> renewal of the Gaff-n-Go Rodeo is set for **Friday, May 10** and **Saturday, May 11** at **Meadow Event Park in Doswell**, north of Richmond. As always, the annual event will give linemen from co-ops, contractors, municipal systems, and investor-owned utilities a chance to demonstrate their skills in an atmosphere of **safety, competition** and **fun**.

"With support from our sponsors, the co-op community and other utilities, this has become one of the premier events of its kind," notes **Richard Johnstone**, VMD Association president and CEO. "We're anticipating as many as 200 line workers, who will be able to showcase the work they do on a daily basis to keep the lights on."

The rodeo, which is free and open to the public, starts at **10 a.m. on May 10** with registration for that day's **TEREX Equipment Operator's Rodeo** as well as for the next day's **Lineman's Rodeo**. Also getting underway on Friday morning will be the **Gaff-n-Go Expo**, where vendors will display the latest in utility services, tools and equipment.

A brief **opening ceremony** kicks off the **Equipment Operator's Rodeo** at 11:15, with competition starting at 11:30 a.m. in several tasks that include a **bucket truck rescue**, an **obstacle course** and a **double dead-end insulator changeout**.

After a hard day on the job, it's time to fire up the grill for the **Gaff-n-Grill** competition, to see which team is king of the smoker. Each team will consist of a grill master and up to three assistants, using their own tools and grills. Their grilled delicacies will be the main course at the complimentary **Gaff-n-Grill Dinner**, which will start about 5 p.m. on May 10 (registration requested).

The Lineman's Rodeo begins bright and early on **May 11** with an opening ceremony at 7:45 and action at 8 a.m., as **journeymen** and **apprentices** test themselves in activities ranging from a hurt man rescue to a capacitor changeout.

**TEREX** is sponsoring the rodeo in connection with **NESCO Specialty Rentals**.

The annual event is planned by a working group of cooperative operations and safety professionals, headed by **Clint Card** of Mecklenburg and **C.T. Bryant**, a long-time employee of Central Virginia Electric Cooperative. Association staff members work closely with this group to make sure every detail is covered.



*A crowd watches a climbing event at last year's Rodeo at Meadow Event Park.*

Overseeing the event is the Association's **Rodeo Committee**, chaired by Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative President and CEO **John Lee**, who points out, "The rodeo is first and foremost about safety. Safety first, safety last, safety always. But it's also about celebrating the spirit of camaraderie that exists among these incredibly skilled professionals.

"And it's serious business, too, as many of our competitors use this event as a springboard to compete in the International Lineman's Rodeo in the fall."

Following the rodeo, the **Hilton Hotel & Spa in Short Pump**, a short drive down I-95 and I-295, will **host the awards banquet** on Saturday evening, when event winners will be recognized. Registered participants and judges receive one complimentary banquet ticket, with tickets for family members and guests available for purchase.

Information on **both rodeos** and the **Gaff-n-Grill**—including registration, releases, and vendor, hotel and event details—is available at [www.gaff-n-go.com](http://www.gaff-n-go.com). Rodeo enthusiasts also can follow the event on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/GaffnGo/>.

*-Report by Steve Johnson, VMD Association Director of Member and Public Relations.*

**VMD Training Center**

**CVEC and SEC Provide Training Substation; Will Benefit All Three Apprenticeship Programs**

Thanks to the abiding generosity of VMD member systems, the Association’s new **Training Center in Palmyra** will soon have its own **training substation**.



*CSE crane service unloading and setting the 32,000-pound transformer on its pad in Palmyra.*

**Central Virginia Electric Cooperative (CVEC)**, **Southside Electric Cooperative (SEC)** and **Pross Construction** all contributed to this large project, which will add **substantial additional capability** to the outside training available at the nine-acre site.

**CVEC** donated a retired substation and **SEC** donated a three-phase power transformer. **Pross Construction**, a local contractor for **Rappahannock Electric Cooperative**, moved and re-constructed the substation. One of Pross’ employees is a graduate of the Association’s substation apprentice program. The transformer was moved from SEC’s Crewe office, and installed last week.

Plans are to continue to **work with vendors** to complete the substation. This will provide vendors with an opportunity to showcase their equipment and will provide Association substation apprentice students with hands-on training opportunities.

Having an on-site training substation at the Palmyra Training Center will provide immediate and direct benefits to all three Association apprenticeship programs, for **line workers, substation technicians** and **system operators**.

A special thank you is being extended to **Bob Wilcox**, a part-time instructor for the Association and a retired REC employee. Bob contributed a significant amount of time and expertise in coordinating both the move and the reconstruction of the substation. And his vision and passion for providing high-quality substation training over the years has helped to measurably improve the program.

**Any vendor companies with an interest in assisting with completion of the project** are encouraged to **contact Bob** at [bwilcox@vmdaec.com](mailto:bwilcox@vmdaec.com).

*-Report by Alan Scruggs, VMD Association VP of Safety & Training Services.*

**Cooperation Among Cooperatives**

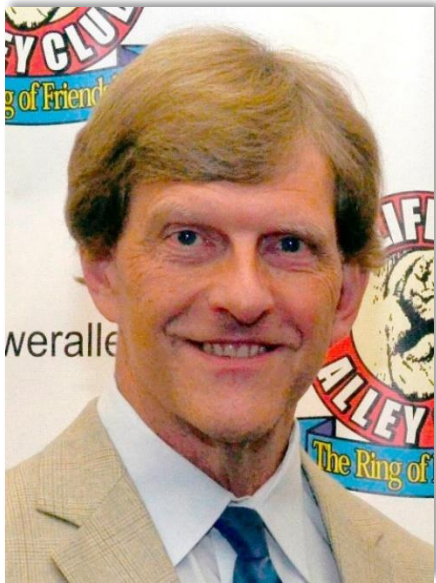
**Virginia Co-op Council Elects New Officers**

At its recent annual conference in Staunton, members of the **Virginia Cooperative Council (VCC)** elected new officers for 2019-20. VMD Association CEO **Richard Johnstone** was elected **president** of the VCC for a second time, having served in that role in 2008-09. **Brad Brown** of Augusta Cooperative in Staunton was elected as VCC vice president and **Jessica Harris** of Mid-Atlantic Farm Credit in Winchester was selected as secretary/treasurer. **Mary Howell**, former Association director of member and public relations, serves as **executive secretary** of the Council, which is composed of all types of cooperative businesses and whose principal focus is **educating Virginians**, in particular young people, about the **cooperative business model**.

Also serving on the 12-member VCC Board are two other representatives of electric cooperatives: **David Lipscomb** of Mecklenburg and **Brian Wolfe** of Rappahannock. During the meeting, held on March 6 at the Museum of American Frontier Culture, **Adam Schwartz** served as the keynote speaker, discussing the breadth and depth of cooperative businesses in the U.S. and across the world. Adam’s company, The Cooperative Way, provides support services to cooperatives in education, training and marketing.

Steve Johnson Joins VMD Staff as Director of Member and Public Relations

There’s a new face at VMD Association headquarters. **Steve Johnson** has joined the team as **director of member and public relations**, effective March 18. Steve will work with the Association and its member systems to promote the cooperative story to a variety of audiences.



**Steve Johnson**  
*A veteran journalist with significant experience working for newspapers and NRECA publications.*

“We’re very pleased to have Steve on board,” said **Richard Johnstone**, president and CEO of the Association. “He has extensive experience in the cooperative network, and his knowledge of the inner workings of both traditional and new media will be of great benefit to our members.”

Steve comes to the Association after more than a dozen years in the **NRECA communications department**, most recently serving as **managing editor for NRECA’s online news publications** and **assistant editor for RE magazine**.

He helped NRECA transition from a **weekly print newspaper** to a **24/7 digital news cycle** across multiple websites and social media, while developing effective ways to communicate the co-op role to members, the news media and the public.

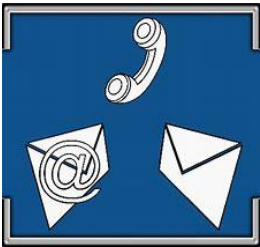
At NRECA, he received **more than 20 regional and national writing awards** for his work on issues ranging from **Hurricane Katrina** to the relationship between an **autistic youth and his co-op**. He also worked with senior leaders at NRECA to advance national and regional meetings and helped member co-ops publicize their local stories to national audiences.

“To me, co-ops are foremost about people. There’s always another story to tell about the ways co-ops contribute to their communities and conveying that good news builds support for the co-op model,” he said.

Steve formerly was a **reporter and editor** at newspapers in **Martinsville, Charlottesville** and **Waynesboro**. He is a graduate of the **University of Mississippi** and the **University of Virginia**, and lives in Hanover County with his wife Cynthia. He can be contacted at [sjohnson@vmdaec.com](mailto:sjohnson@vmdaec.com).

Welcome to the VMD cooperative family Steve!

Help Us Keep You Informed!



If you have story ideas, news or information of interest and benefit to other members of the electric cooperative community in our three-state area, please contact

Phyllis Long at [plong@vmdaec.com](mailto:plong@vmdaec.com) (804) 297-3161  
or  
Steve Johnson at [sjohnson@vmdaec.com](mailto:sjohnson@vmdaec.com) (804) 297-3644