

April 5, 2019

## Co-op Leaders

### Kent Farmer is New Chairman of CFC Board of Directors

Kent Farmer, president and CEO of Rappahannock Electric Cooperative, was elected **Chairman of the Board of Directors** of the financing arm of electric co-ops **during its landmark 50th anniversary**.

On March 11, the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation Board **elected Kent** as chairman at its meeting in Orlando, Florida. He had been vice chairman and has **represented Region 1** on the board **since 2014**.

Kent told CFC *Solutions* **he looks forward to his term** as chairman of “an outstanding organization made up of ‘cooperative people’ from across the country working daily to help us better serve our members.” He will **chair a 23-member board** that sets overall policy, establishes programs and develops strategies for CFC.

President and CEO of REC since 2004, Kent also is president of **Rappahannock Electric Communications Inc.**, REC’s wholly owned subsidiary. He’s been at REC **since 1979**, serving in a variety of roles including **chief operating officer** and **chief financial officer**.



**New CFC Board Chairman Kent Farmer is flanked by Vice Chairman Dean Tesch of Wisconsin (I) and Secretary-Treasurer Alan Wattles of Illinois. (Photo Courtesy CFC.)**

“Serving as CFO at REC before becoming CEO has been a tremendous benefit in serving on the CFC board,” he said. “I know what our members’ financial needs and issues are and how CFC can assist the membership in satisfying them.”

Since its creation in 1969, CFC has grown to a member-owned and controlled finance cooperative with **about \$27 billion in assets**. It provides support for electric infrastructure projects, works to expand the availability of private-sector capital for rural electric systems, and introduces co-ops to banks and investors on Wall Street.

## **Congratulations to Kent!**

*-Report by Steven Johnson, VMD Association Director of Member & Public Relations.*

## Co-ops in the News

### MEC Climbs in ‘Top Employer’ List



**Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative representatives accept the 2019 Best Places to Work in Virginia award. From left, Best Companies Group CEO Peter Burke; MEC employees David Lipscomb, Deborah Winn, and Dustin Francis; and Virginia Business magazine President and Publisher Bernie Niemeier.**

For the second year in a row, **Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative** has been named as one of the **Best Places to Work in Virginia**. The co-op climbed to **No. 15 in 2019** from No. 18 in 2018 in the **annual survey of best employers** compiled by *Virginia Business* magazine and Best Companies Group.

“I am very proud of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative and its employees, and I’m pleased that our organization has been recognized for the second consecutive year by *Virginia Business* magazine as one of the best places to work in Virginia,” said **John C. Lee Jr.**, the co-op’s president and CEO.

The survey and awards program identifies, recognizes and honors the best places of employment in Virginia which benefit the state’s economy, workforce and businesses. The survey **consists of two parts**.

One **focuses on company workplace** policies, practices, philosophy, systems and demographics. The second, worth 75 percent of the final grade, **surveys employees on their experiences** in the workplace.

At 104 employees, MEC was **among the smallest contenders** in the midsize category, which consists of businesses with **100 to 249 employees**.

“We are fully cognizant that maintaining a positive work environment results in a fully invested workforce that is focused intently on caring for our members. This recognition is based on workplace policies and practices as well as how our employees view their employer, and this honor is a testament that MEC employees hold their employer in high regard,” John added.

“Our cooperative strives to create an atmosphere where employees can thrive and come to work every day at an organization that is recognized for its commitment to teamwork, transparency, and excellence.”

*-Report by Debbie Blue Winn, MEC Member and Public Relations Specialist.*

## Co-op Innovation

### **Firefly Broadband Service Is a Hit at CVEC Event**

For Amy Franklin, **Firefly means the end of 26 years of driving from Appomattox to Lynchburg** because she can now work remotely from home. For Rev. Mitch Luckie, **Firefly means his wife doesn't have to spend extra hours grading papers** in a Bedford County classroom because she can now do it online.

And for other members of **Central Virginia Electric Cooperative**, Firefly means a **welcome to the wired world**.

“We feel that bringing broadband to our local community will increase business opportunities, safety for our citizens and educational opportunities that we've not been able to take advantage of before,” said **H.T. Brown Jr.**, chairman of the CVEC board and its wholly owned Firefly subsidiary.

About **100 co-op leaders, staffers, dignitaries and guests** celebrated the successful launch of CVEC's **Firefly Fiber Broadband** service at a **March 26 event** at the co-op's **Appomattox office**.

“We have found that the community has really accepted it. They love it,” said **Gary Wood**, president and CEO of the co-op. “But this is just the celebration of the start. We've got a long way to go and we're going to get there.”

About **300 members are currently connected**, with service in the works for **another 400-plus** members who signed up for internet-based phone service and broadband at speeds up to a **gigabit per second**.

Those maiden connections are in homes served by **CVEC's Appomattox substation**, though the vision is larger than that. According to plans, in five years or so, all **37,000 co-op members** and maybe some non-members will have access to Firefly.

To Josh Mills of Appomattox, owner of Mills Heating & Air Conditioning, that **translates into more business** since he doesn't have to rig his phone as a wi-fi hot spot. And his children can do more school work online. “It's gold,” he said at the ceremony. “It's just been an educational benefit.”

**Gary praised the “bold” decision by the CVEC board** in November 2017 to embark on the pilot project that led to the creation of Firefly. It was, he said, an example of the seventh cooperative principle: **Concern for Community**.

“When we started the project, we had no design, no material. We had no money. We had no name for it. We didn't have any fiber,” he said.

But **CVEC did have a strong team** of partners in business, government and the cooperative community. The Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission provided a grant of **nearly \$1 million** and Appomattox County signed an economic initiative. The **Rural Utilities Service** also came in with part of the financing for the **4,600-mile, \$110 million project**.



*H.T. Brown Jr., chairman of the CVEC board and its wholly owned Firefly subsidiary, talks at a celebration of the new broadband service.*

Gary hailed the cooperation of the **Virginia Department of Transportation**, since the fiber cable is being installed along rights of way, and his own co-op staff.

Several speakers **commended CVEC** for connecting its members in the 21<sup>st</sup> century much like co-ops did in **electrifying the countryside in the 1930s**.

“It is an absolute economic necessity to have access to broadband coverage. The exact same arguments against doing it are the same arguments they made against rural electrification,” said **Evan Feinman**, chief broadband adviser to **Gov. Ralph Northam**. “The exact same organizations that solved that problem are going to be a big part of solving this one.”

Others in attendance included **Paul Breakman**, senior director for business and technology strategies at NRECA; **State Sen.**

**Mark Peake** of Lynchburg; **Delegate C. Matthew Fariss** of Rustburg; members of the **Appomattox County Board of Supervisors**; and **Jonathan Chambers**, a partner at Conexon, which works with CVEC and co-ops on broadband development.

“It took hard work to build the original electric networks and it's no different today,” Chambers said. “If you don't do that hard work, nobody else will. There is no substitute for it. There's no shortcut.”

*-Report by Steven Johnson, VMD Association Director of Member & Public Relations.*

### Co-ops in the News

## **CVEC, CBEC Broadband Efforts Receive \$1.7 Million State Boost**

A pair of **VMD member co-ops** are in line for about **\$1.7 million in state grants** to help them bring the **digital world** to members who lack access to broadband.

**Gov. Ralph Northam** announced March 29 that **Central Virginia Electric Cooperative** and **Craig-Botetourt Electric** are among the recipients of support from the **Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI)**.

**CVEC** will receive **\$301,748** as it rolls out its cutting-edge **Firefly Fiber Broadband** in parts of **Albemarle County** in conjunction with the Albemarle Broadband Authority. Working with **Fluvanna County**, **CVEC** will receive **\$641,967** to bring Firefly to members there.

**Craig-Botetourt Electric Cooperative** is targeted for **\$758,998** as it works with **Botetourt County**.

“This funding will help to close the digital divide in Virginia by putting in place the necessary infrastructure to expand affordable and reliable broadband service to currently unserved rural communities,” Northam said in a statement.

**Gary Wood**, president and CEO of CVEC, said the Albemarle grant will help to underwrite work south and west of Charlottesville. It will bring service to **about 700 homes** served by CVEC's Martins Store substation, currently under construction, by the **end of 2019 or early 2020**.

New connections in the Columbia area in **southeastern Fluvanna** will follow, he said, and provide Firefly access to **another 600 homes in early 2020**, he added.

“These areas have no real broadband and no expectation of ever getting it,” Gary noted. “Some people had weak satellite service or used their cell phones as hot spots but ran up against data limits. So now they'll have an option they've never had.”

**Shawn Hildebrand**, CEO of Craig-Botetourt Electric Co-op, said the grant will enable the co-op to build out its fiber service to **621 homes in Botetourt County**. Engineering will start in the next couple of months with a projected in-service date of July 2020.

“It's all about being able to ensure that the folks we are responsible for in our communities have the same services available to them that everybody else has,” Shawn said. “We're getting the opportunity to do the same thing that rural electrification did in the 1930s.”

**VATI** is a state-financed program administered by the **Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development** that provides funding against matches from recipients. In all, more than **\$4.9 million in grants for 11 projects** are included in the latest round of funding.

*-Report by Steven Johnson, VMD Association Director of Member & Public Relations.*



*Gary Wood, president and CEO of Central Virginia Electric Cooperative, and Firefly mascot Flash give broadband a thumbs-up.*

## Co-op Leaders

### SEC CEO Jeff Edwards Speaking at Virginia Chamber Event

Electric cooperatives are committed to spurring job activity in rural areas, and that's the message that **Jeff Edwards**, president and CEO of **Southside Electric Cooperative**, plans to bring to a **high-level economic development forum**.

He'll be speaking at the **Virginia Chamber of Commerce's 2019 Conference on Energy & Infrastructure**, to be held **April 17-18 in Roanoke**. The theme for the meeting is "Foundations of Economic Development and the Impact on Job Growth."

That's close to Jeff's heart since he and **John Lee**, president and CEO of **Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative**, were among the driving forces behind the creation of the **Power Line Worker School** through **Southside Virginia Community College's (SVCC)** Blackstone campus.

"What I'm hoping to be able to stress is not only the type of skill sets that we're looking for, but the success we've had with our public-private partnership with SVCC," Jeff said. "It's been turning out a number of high-caliber graduates that the co-ops, the investor-owners and the electrical contractors have taken advantage of and put into our workforce."



*Southside CEO Jeff Edwards.*

Jeff is scheduled to be part of an **April 17 panel** on "Creating a Competitive Energy Workforce" along with **Steven Jumper** of Washington, D.C.-based utility WGL and **Daniel Menahem** of sPower, a sustainable energy company. **State Sen. Stephen Newman** will moderate.

The Power Line Worker School continues to surge, with a **record graduating class** in November 2018. It prepares students for **well-paying jobs** in rural parts — the average yearly pay for an electrical line repairer or installer in Virginia is nearly \$63,000, a paystub rivalled by few occupations in smaller communities.

"In our area, we find many of our young people go off to school and they don't come back. But with this particular program, we're tapping into a niche. This is a really unique opportunity for them to take an 11-week course and come out of there with a handful of credentials and guaranteed employment," said Jeff, Southside CEO since 2007 and a former member of the **Virginia Rural Jobs Council**.

With the way renewable power is taking off, Jeff plans to point out rural regions might boast of more energy-related jobs than just keeping the lights on.

"It's hard to build a solar facility in an urban environment; it takes a lot of land," he noted. "That's what we have in abundance in our particular area. So when these young people come out, there are going to be opportunities for them to work with some of these solar companies doing the installations of the panels or wiring the panels together."

Maybe labor that doesn't involve the exact skill set as the Power Line Worker program. But it will require the kind of **mechanical aptitude** and **electrical knowledge** that's taught through SVCC, he said. "I'm fairly certain that with the skills our graduates have when they come out, any of these solar installers would love to have them work for them. We need to keep thinking about expanding these kinds of opportunities."

Jeff said **Kent Farmer**, president and CEO of **Rappahannock Electric Cooperative**, suggested him for the conference when Kent, who's active in the chamber, had a conflict date.

*-Report by Steven Johnson, VMD Association Director of Member & Public Relations.*

## Co-op Commitment to Safety

### NOVEC Issues 'Balloon' Reminder

It should go without saying, but sometimes a reminder is in order: **Keep flying things away from power lines.**

NOVEC personnel recently worked to **disengage a balloon** that got **entangled in its power lines**. So a cautionary note to members through **news releases and social media** at a time when balloons and kites dot the spring skies is a **worthwhile idea**.

Kites, balloons, drones, and model airplanes can cause power outages if they touch power lines, and anyone holding onto a metallic balloon or kite with metal parts could suffer an electric shock or electrocution.

“Be aware of your surroundings and always keep flying objects far from power lines,” stressed **Skip Hollcroft**, NOVEC’s construction manager.

Among the recommendations for safety:

- Fly objects in an open field, far away from electric power and transmission lines, roads and highways.
- Only fly in good weather during the day – never in wet or stormy weather, or at night.
- Use dry string for kites and balloons – never wire.
- Do not fly anything made of metallic materials, including metallic ribbons or streamers. Even Mylar helium balloons conduct electricity and can cause electric shock or electrocution.
- Always attach a weight to Mylar and helium balloons to prevent them from flying away. Releasing them can cause power outages, fires, and a hazard to wildlife.
- Keep a drone in your sight at all times. Hitting a power line can cause an outage for hundreds of people or cause a line to fall, which is extremely dangerous. Do NOT go near a power line that is down. Call 911 or the power company immediately.
- The Commonwealth of Virginia, many other states, and a number of countries have banned paper sky lanterns. They have caused fires and vehicle accidents, and have harmed people and animals.



*-Report by Priscilla Knight, NOVEC Sr. Communication Specialist.*

## Honoring Linework

### Get Ready for Lineworker Appreciation Day, er, Days!

Lineworkers toil in **darkness**, in **rain**, in **ice**, and in all kinds of unsavory conditions to **keep the lights on** — all without fanfare. So it’s only appropriate that we take care of the fanfare for them.



*Be sure to celebrate the bravery and tenacity of lineworkers on April 8 or 18, or even better — on both days!*

A **national day of appreciation for lineworkers** is coming up, and although some utilities celebrate it on different days, they all do so in **April** — and with gratitude.

Many co-ops will observe **National Lineman Appreciation Day** on **April 8**, pursuant to a **2014** directive from the **NRECA Board of Directors** that sets aside the second Monday in April for the observance.

Other utilities recognize a **fixed date of April 18**, the residue of legislation that cleared the **U.S. Senate in 2013**.

Either way, **Alan Scruggs**, vice president of safety and training services at the VMD Association, said it’s important to take time to acknowledge the contributions of line crews.

“Lineworkers are the **heart of our electric cooperatives**,” said Alan. “They’re first responders in our community, working to ensure our members have safe and reliable service.”

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, more than **6,500 men and women** are employed as **power line installers** and **repairers** in our **three-state region** alone.

What can co-ops do to promote the big day? Many co-ops publish **social media posts on Facebook, Instagram** and **Twitter** thanking lineworkers for their service under the hashtag **#ThankALineworker**.

A quick **video or two** of a lineworker explaining daily duties makes an intriguing addition to social media or websites.

Others honor their **brave workers** with a **special breakfast** or **lunch** in each of their regions — even carrying the **food** into the field as a **surprise**.

We're proud  
to power  
your life.

#ThankALineworker



And still others place **blank cards** in their office lobbies where **members** visiting to pay their bills can jot a **quick note of thanks** to be forwarded to line crews or taped to the wall.

“**Lineworkers** do their jobs so well that we often take them for granted,” Alan said. “Ideally, we’d celebrate them every single day, but setting aside a little bit of time in April seems like the least we can do.”

[Additional display and promotional materials are available from NRECA.](#)

*-Report by Steven Johnson, VMD Association Director of Member & Public Relations.*

## Co-op People

### ‘Sonny’ Callahan Retires from Choptank Board

After 21 years of dedicated service, **Francis “Sonny” Callahan Jr.**, director for Caroline County, retired last month from the **Choptank Electric Cooperative** Board of Directors.

He began his Choptank Electric career in **1965 as a temporary staker’s helper**. He became a **journeyman lineman** in 1969 and served as a **chief lineman** from 1973-1990. He was awarded the job of **purchasing agent** in 1990 and retired from that position in 1995.

Having been a Choptank Electric member since 1966, Sonny still wanted to influence the company in a positive way, so in 1998 he ran for and **won the Caroline County seat** on the board of directors. He received his **Director Gold** credentials through the NRECA Directors Certificate education programs in 2017.

“On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank Sonny for all of his dedicated years of service to Choptank Electric Cooperative,” said **Jeffrey Rathell**, chairman of the board. “He was an asset to the board and we wish him all the best in his retirement.”



*Francis “Sonny” Callahan Jr.*

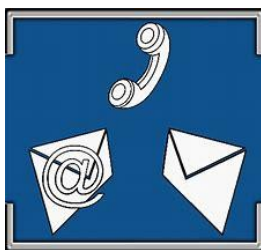
*-Report by Beth Gertsch, Choptank Electric Manager of Marketing, Communications & Member Engagement.*

## Personals

### News About Members of the VMD Cooperative Family

VMD Association VP of Communications & PR Bill Sherrod is dealing with a serious illness and would appreciate both your prayers and notes of encouragement. Bill’s mailing address is: 8716 Lakefront Dr., Henrico, VA 23294.

### 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

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