

May 24, 2019

## Historic Day

### VMD Training Center Opens for Business

Call it a perfect cooperative structure.

With the snip of a ribbon, the **Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Electric Cooperative Training Center** officially opened May 22 during a ceremony that brought **more than 120** co-op officials, elected representatives, government officials and dignitaries to the site north of Palmyra, Va.

“This is a day we have literally dreamed about for decades,” said **Richard G. Johnstone Jr.**, president and CEO of the VMD Association. “The training center is really the embodiment of the cooperative spirit. Every one of our member systems identified the need for a state-of-the-art training center and worked diligently to bring this day about.”



*Herbert Patrick, chairman of the VMD Association Board, snips the ribbon to officially open the new training center with the help of Gary Wood, president and CEO of Central Virginia Electric Cooperative, and an assembly of co-op and Fluvanna County dignitaries.*

**Gary Wood**, president and CEO of **Central Virginia Electric Cooperative**, and **Herbert Patrick**, chairman of the VMD Board, jointly cut the ribbon to the building, with a helping hand from **John C. Lee Jr.**, president and CEO of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative; **Richard**, representing the Association; Fluvanna Chamber President **Rudy Garcia**; **Roberta Harlowe**, treasurer and past chairwoman of the CVEC Board; **George Goin**, a CVEC board member; Fluvanna County Administrator **Steve Nichols**; and **Mike Sheridan**, chairman of the Fluvanna County Board of Supervisors.

The **9,600-square-foot building**, the centerpiece of the **\$1.5 million project**, has hosted several meetings and classes in recent weeks as a soft opening.

The dedication demonstrated how far the Association and its co-ops have come since the 1990s, when lineman classes were held at an aging training facility in Culpeper.

In **2013**, training moved from Culpeper to three **modular trailers at the Palmyra site**, thanks to a **lease from CVEC**, which owned the property across the road from its district office. The Association subsequently purchased the CVEC land on **very favorable terms**.

Richard presented Gary with a **resolution of gratitude** from the Association for CVEC's assistance in the project. Richard also paid tribute in the audience to several former Association safety trainers who contributed to the development of the training center, including retired safety department vice presidents **Ron Campbell** and **Debbie Swiderski**.

“This building is a great investment in a number of ways,” Gary pointed out. “It’s a deposit on the continuing investment co-ops are making in Fluvanna County. It’s an investment in all the instructors and trainers because you now have a great tool to deliver your messages. And it’s an investment among co-ops in our relationships, because our strength comes from the partnerships we share.”



*A crowd of about 120 co-op leaders, elected officials, and business and local government representatives gather at the May 22 dedication of the new training center in Palmyra, Va.*



The building has three classrooms — one each named for **Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware**. The rooms employ state-of-the-art video technology with a touchpad system to control lighting and A/V equipment. The building also offers a full-service kitchen with a catering window, a break room and showers in the men’s and women’s restrooms. A large **garage bay** provides space for equipment demos and training in inclement weather.



*John C. Lee Jr., president and CEO of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative, pulls the covering to reveal the Storm Soldier statue in front of the training center. John Lee is flanked by Roberta Harlowe and George Goin, directors at Central Virginia Electric Cooperative.*

“The only way you get work done is by training,” said **County Administrator Steve Nichols**. “So the training for the men and women that occurs here will keep them safe in the field and keep our communities safe with the electrical power that you have provided.”

Other guests included **Virginia Delegate Lee Ware**; a representative from **Delegate Rob Bell’s office**; NRECA Chief Operating Officer **Jeffrey Connor**; and **Lee Earhart** of CoBank.

An outstanding feature of the new building is the “**Storm Soldier**” statue in front of the facility. Developed by Arkansas sculptor **Ron Moore, John Lee, Roberta Harlowe** and **George Goin** officially **lifted the veil to applause** after Richard read the inscriptions on **two plaques** that sit at the base of the statue.

Inside the building, visitors found a **rehabilitated mural** from the Association’s former training center in Culpeper and a **color-coded map** designating the territories of member systems.

In the course of time, the Fluvanna center **will train thousands of cooperative employees and directors**, Richard noted.

“In addition to lineworkers, we’ll be providing training to engineers, accountants, customer service representatives and the elected directors who serve on the boards of our member cooperatives,” he said. “We’ll also offer training to employees from Virginia municipal electric systems, and we intend to work with community colleges as well. A lot of exciting training is in our future, and in Fluvanna County’s, too.”

To view a video recapping the dedication ceremony, be sure to visit <http://vmdaec.com/content/palmyra-training-center-dedication-may-22-2019>



*John C. Lee Jr. (l), president and CEO of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative, joins Roberta Harlowe and George Goin, directors at Central Virginia Electric Cooperative, following the unveiling of the Storm Soldier statue and the reading of the two plaques at the base of the statue.*

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

Showcase for Lineworkers

Gaff-n-Go Is Now  
'One of the Largest Regional Rodeos in the Country'

More **competitors**, more **vendors**, a bigger **awards banquet** and even more **grillers** — just about everything about the 17<sup>th</sup> annual Gaff-n-Go Equipment Operator’s and Lineman’s Rodeo **set a record**.

“We’re really proud that this has grown from pretty humble beginnings into one of the largest regional rodeos in the country,” said **John C. Lee**, CEO of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative and chairman of the Rodeo Committee. “We’re also really proud to stage an event where our lineworkers can demonstrate the hard work, the determination and the mental and physical toughness this profession requires.”

**More than 150 lineworkers from six states**, including **two U.S. Army Prime Power teams** from the 249<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion at Fort Belvoir, climbed poles, rescued dummies, operated heavy equipment and swapped out capacitors as part of the **largest rodeo on the East Coast**.

The Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives (VMDAEC) hosted the **May 10-11 event** at **Meadow Event Park** in Doswell, Va., while **TEREX provided primary sponsorship** in partnership with **NESCO Specialty Rentals**.

“It is so impressive to observe these professionals as they work 40 feet above the ground on a course of utility poles while always keeping safe and efficient work practices front and center,” said **Richard Johnstone**, VMDAEC president and CEO.

**Delegate Lamont Bagby** of Richmond kicked off the festivities by presenting **John Lee** with a **proclamation** issued by **Gov. Ralph Northam** declaring May 11 to be **Electric Utility Lineworkers Day in Virginia**.

The May 10 **equipment operators rodeo** tested each three-member team’s ability to maneuver trucks and equipment used in electric distribution systems.



*A member of the U.S. Army's Prime Power team from the 249<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion at Fort Belvoir, Va., focuses intently during competition on Saturday, May 11. Two Army teams from Fort Belvoir took part in this year's rodeo.*

While crews maneuvered around obstacles, nearly a dozen **grilling teams** barbecued pork, chicken and beef in the **Gaff-n-Grill event**. A barbecue barrier fell when **Renee Chapline**, vice president of communications and government affairs at **Prince George Electric Cooperative**, became the **first official female grill team member**.

Rappahannock Electric Cooperative’s **“Blowing Smoke”** grillers won **first place** in the event, sponsored by **Lee Electrical**, with all the grillers’ efforts furnishing a **free dinner** on Friday evening for participants and families.

At the same time, **Prince George Electric Cooperative** captured first place in the highly competitive **T-shirt contest** with its **“United We Climb”** design.

**On Saturday**, three-member **journeyman teams** and **individual apprentices** competed in events that simulate real life. **Hundreds of spectators** milled around, checking displays that ranged from **99.3 KISS FM** to **Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative’s** mobile “Power of Electricity” display.

**John Lee** noted that the number of competitors has jumped to **more than 150** from **119 in 2013**. The 2019 field also included **two U.S. Army teams** from the 249<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion (Prime Power) stationed at **Fort Belvoir, Virginia**.

“These guys work with each other in major storm events in the middle of the night,” John said. “I think it’s highly comforting for them to know that the guy on the next pole is someone they met and got to know here at the rodeo.”

The **vendor expo** featured **51 exhibitors** in 2019, compared with **30 in 2013**. Among the showcases was **Southside Virginia Community College (SVCC)**, which shared information about its **Power Line Worker Training School**, operated in conjunction with **VMD co-ops**.

And **540 tickets** were sold for the **awards banquet**, held **Saturday night** at the **Hilton Richmond Short Pump Hotel**, up from **330 in 2013**. Keynote speaker **Don Harbuck**, senior vice president for customer success at **Northwest Lineman College**, traced the development of the lineman profession from its beginnings at the dawn of telephone service to today.

“Take pride in what you do,” Harbuck urged. “It is one of the best occupations there is.”

Additionally, participants and spectators dug deep in their pockets to **help raise nearly \$6,000** to support a **Dominion Energy worker recently injured** in the line of duty.

“This event is just getting bigger and better each year and we look forward to continued growth thanks to our sponsors, our volunteers, our judges and most of all, our lineworkers,” said VMD Association CEO **Richard Johnstone**.

Among those volunteers: **Master Judge Clint Card of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative** and **C.T. Bryant**, retired from **Central Virginia Electric Cooperative**, who are **co-chairmen** of the **Rodeo Working Group**.



*Patricia Dorey, a board member at both Delaware Electric Cooperative and the VMD Association, stands by DEC’s entry in the T-shirt competition with husband Terry.*





(L-R) CVEC's T.R. Eubank and two apprentice lineworkers, Blaine Cunningham and Billy Cascio, take a break during the rodeo, which featured the largest group of participants-more than 150-in its 17-year history.

Winning the three-member journeyman category was the Dominion Energy team of Brock Hawthorne, Jason Langhorne and Robert Tuthill with Michael Sims, Jacob Kelley and Anson Perry from Blue Ridge EMC finishing in second place.

The **highest co-op team** — third overall — was the **Delaware Electric** squad of **Philip Collison, Dave Morgan and Michael Layton**. They took the **Jimmy Gardner Award** for the **highest score** among **VMD Association teams**. Gardner served as one of the first cooperative linemen in Virginia and lived into his 90s to see the early success and growth of the rodeo event. In all, **27 journeyman teams** participated in the rodeo.

**Top apprentice honors** among **61 competitors** went to **Will Reid of BARC Electric Cooperative**, who registered a stellar performance across five events, including first place in a written test and third in the hurt man rescue. **T.W. Parks of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative** and **Zach Matthews of Dominion** placed second and third overall in the apprentice division.

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The **TEREX Equipment Operator's Rodeo** went to the **Rappahannock Electric Cooperative** team of **Thomas Bailey, Addison Spicer and Alister Pollard**. They registered a **perfect score** in less time than their **23 competitors**. **Jared Mayton, Brandon Senger and Delbert Orsborne** of **Southside Electric Cooperative** finished second with a **second REC team** of **Jason Morris, Chad Foster and Kevin Houston** in third.

For complete results and photos from this year's event, visit [www.gaff-n-go.com](http://www.gaff-n-go.com) and check out *Transmission & Distribution World's* coverage at <https://www.tdworld.com/electric-utility-operations/linemen-compete-record-breaking-gaff-n-go-rodeo>

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

**Co-op Spirit**

**Rappahannock Employees Put Children First**

Some of the children arrive **two grades behind** in school. Others carry **severe emotional problems**. The majority of the children **never had a real family** and most aren't familiar with **positive adult role models**. But for a full day, on April 30, those children saw employees from **Rappahannock Electric Cooperative (REC)** working to **make a difference** in their lives.

The community day at **Childhelp** in **Culpeper County** was a joint effort between **REC** and the **National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA)**. **More than 100** employees from the two organizations participated. Among the projects completed by REC and NRECA staff were:

- Landscaping the entrance to the Childhelp;
- Staining and painting playground equipment, as well as a gazebo;
- Organizing a "bike barn," a storage facility for the children's bicycles;
- Helping teachers in the classroom;
- Organizing the library; and
- Presenting an electric safety demonstration for the children.



*Volunteers from Rappahannock Electric Cooperative and NRECA team up to fix children's bicycles at the event in Culpeper County.*

As part of the project, REC and NRECA first worked together to **install two utility poles** with **dark-sky compliant LED** lights to improve safety for Childhelp employees and the children.

"To see REC in the community and caring about the children at Childhelp really brings home what REC is all about," said **Wade Hardiman**, director of volunteer and community services at Childhelp, which includes six group homes for abused, neglected and at-risk children ages 5 to 14 on 270 acres.

**Kent D. Farmer**, president and CEO of REC, pointed out that REC and NRECA each tackle many service projects on their own, but **had not previously teamed up** to serve the community. “For all of us to be able to come together to do this, that makes it even more special,” Kent said.

To learn more about REC’s day of caring at Childhelp, view the co-op’s video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xh746n9V27U&t=1s>



*More than 100 volunteers from Rappahannock Electric Cooperative and NRECA teamed up to spruce up Childhelp’s campus in Culpeper County.*

*-Report by Casey Hollins, REC Director of Communications and Public Relations.*

**Co-op People**

**Choptank Hires Grassroots Veteran to Engage Members**

**Valerie Connelly** is the new **Vice President of Government Affairs and Public Relations** at **Choptank Electric Cooperative**. Valerie will begin her duties on Monday, July 1, 2019.

“We are very pleased that Valerie is joining the Choptank Electric team,” said **Mike Malandro**, president and CEO of Choptank Electric Cooperative. “We are looking forward to engaging with our local representatives, political leaders and our members to bring about positive change.”

Prior to this new position, Valerie was the **Executive Director** of the **Maryland Farm Bureau**, a grassroots organization that promotes the policies and views of its members at the local, state and federal levels of government on behalf of more than 26,000 farm and rural families.

Serving on staff with the Maryland Farm Bureau since May of 1995, Valerie served as Executive Director for the Bureau since November 2013.

Her extensive experience includes serving as the **Legislative Director** for **three members** of the **House of Representatives** on Capitol Hill for 10 years. She served as primary staff contact for the **Energy & Commerce Committee**, the Banking & Financial Services Committee and the Judiciary Committee.

In addition, she also served on the **Governor’s Commission on Migratory and Seasonal Farm Labor**, has served as First Vice Chair of the **FORVM for Rural Maryland** and as a member of the **Maryland Air Quality Control Advisory Council**. She has also been a member of the Department of Agriculture’s **Nutrient Management Advisory Committee**, the Task Force on **Agricultural Land Preservation** and the American Farm Bureau Federation’s **General Counsel Advisory Committee**.

Currently, Valerie serves on the steering committee to implement the Maryland Agricultural Commission’s **Strategic Plan for Agriculture** and is on the board of the **LEAD Maryland Foundation**. Valerie holds a bachelor’s in political science from American University.

She resides in **Cecil County, Maryland** with her husband, Steve.

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



*Valerie Connelly will be joining Choptank on July 1 after having served as Executive Director of the Maryland Farm Bureau since 2013.*

**Two Stalwarts Conclude Distinguished Careers at DEC**

A pair of **Delaware Electric Cooperative (DEC)** veterans **retired this month** after **decades of dedicated service** to their members.

Chief Operating Officer (COO) **Gary Cripps** retired after **20 years of service**. Gary joined DEC in 1999 and was quickly promoted to **controller**. He was eventually promoted to **vice president of accounting and finance** and, in 2016, was appointed COO.



As COO, Gary oversaw enterprise-wide **strategic planning** and the day-to-day **operations** of DEC. During the past twenty years, Gary has made **significant contributions** to the co-op and its 100,000 members. One of his first duties as an employee in the member services department was to assist with **deregulation**.



*DEC COO Gary Cripps made significant contributions during his 20-year career at the co-op, from helping to modernize technology infrastructure to strengthening DEC's financial position.*

In various other positions, Gary went on to help **modernize DEC's technology infrastructure**, **strengthen DEC's financial position**, **acquire access to cheaper capital** and **improve employee relations**.

In addition to his co-op duties, Gary has been **active in the community**. He was a **past president** of the **Milford Rotary Club**, member of the **WSFS Southern Advisory Board** and **vice chair** of the **Bayhealth Foundation's Board of Directors**.

**Gary Pusey** also retired in May after an incredible **48 years of service**. When Gary joined the cooperative in **1971**, the not-for-profit utility **only served 19,000 meters**. In April, he had the honor of **installing the 100,000<sup>th</sup> meter** near Greenwood in Sussex County.



*Gary Pusey retired after 48 years of service, having seen DEC grow from 19,000 meters in 1971 to 100,000 today; in fact, he had the honor of installing the 100,000<sup>th</sup> in April, a month before he retired.*

According to Gary, “It’s a good company to work for. You have job security, and you don’t see people leave. They stay for a long time, just like myself. I’ve been here for a long time and have really enjoyed it, the camaraderie between the employees. So it’s been a good time.”

*-Report by Jeremy Tucker, DEC Manager of Marketing and Communications.*

