

January 16, 2020

General Assembly 2020

Co-op Leaders Turn Out in Force at Agribusiness Banquet

Electric co-ops in Virginia made their presence known **Jan. 9** at the annual **Virginia Agribusiness Council's Legislative Appreciation Banquet**, traditionally one of the most important events held in conjunction with the yearly kickoff of the **General Assembly**.

More than **100 electric co-op leaders** packed **21 tables** as the **single largest segment among nearly 1,000 attendees**, including **representatives from government and the private sector** who highlighted the importance of agribusiness to the **Virginia economy**.

Gov. Ralph Northam was present, as were **Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax** and **House Speaker Eileen Filler-Corn**, who was sworn in on **Jan. 8** as the **first woman speaker** in the history of the **Virginia House of Delegates**.



Virginia Governor Ralph Northam (c) is seen at the reception with CVEC staff member Galen Creekmore (l) and CVEC CEO Gary Wood.

Numerous **state senators, delegates** and **state agency representatives** including **Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Bettina Ring** also attended the **49th annual event**, held at the **Old Dominion Building** on the **Richmond Raceway Complex**.

"We want to continue together to do all that we can to **support farmers**," the governor said. He noted the attendance from **4-H members and FFA (formerly Future Farmers of America)**, saying, "These are the people that are our **future** so encourage them and encourage other youngsters that agriculture and forestry are great career paths."



Sen. John Bell (2nd from right) visits with NOVEC Board Chairman Wade House (l); CEO Stan Feuerberg (2nd from left); and VP of Public Relations Lisa Hooker (r). Association Counsel Sam Brumberg is seen at center.

Secretary Ring called the banquet "the **Oscars for agriculture**" and noted **agriculture and forestry** are Virginia's **first and third largest industries**.

"We sell our products **globally** because our products are the **very best**," House Speaker Filler-Corn said, noting that the **unity of the agriculture community is important in helping to overcome uncertain economic times**. The industry is "actually a **fundamental building block of our society**," she added.

Lea Scott, chair of the council's board of directors and vice president for agronomy services at **Universal Tobacco Leaf Co.**, said agribusiness leaders plan to work with lawmakers on issues such as **budget support for agriculture, technical assistance to soil and water conservation districts and development of international markets for Virginia products**.

"Our council continues to work in a bipartisan way to speak with a **unified voice for Virginia agribusiness**," he said. "Virginia's most **technologically advanced, most innovative businesses** are **agribusinesses**."

The evening included a reception with samples of **Virginia's Finest** products from **peanuts to oysters to sweets to wine**, and a buffet-style dinner featuring Virginia products. The **Distinguished Friend of Agribusiness Award** went to **Del. Mark L. Keam**, who represents the **35th House District in Northern Virginia**. He was recognized for being a **leader on agribusiness** issues.

Matt Faulconer of Rappahannock Electric Cooperative and **Andrew Vehorn of the VMDAEC staff** are members of the council board.



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

Secretary Bettina Ring reminded the nearly 1,000 attendees that agriculture and forestry are Virginia's first and third largest industries.



Sen. Lynwood Lewis (I) chats with A&N Electric Cooperative Board Chairman Addison Nottingham.



Prince George Board Member Herbert Patrick and his wife Doris enjoy sampling some of Virginia's Finest food items during the reception.

Co-op Innovation

Rappahannock Electric Cooperative Seeks Approval to Test New Rate Program

Rappahannock Electric Cooperative (REC) wants to **pay its member-owners** to use **less electricity** during certain hours in the summer, according to an application filed with the **State Corporation Commission**.

“While utilities traditionally charge the same rate per kilowatt-hour regardless of when electricity is used, the actual cost of producing that electricity varies significantly depending on the time of day and time of year,” said **David Koogler**, **REC’s senior vice president of member services and external affairs**.

“Of the nearly **9,000 hours in a year**, just **five hours** in the **summer** help determine a significant portion of the cost that REC pays for wholesale electricity the following year.”

The **goals** of REC’s innovative **pilot program** are to:

- gauge member-owners’ interest in participating in a program that provides a **financial incentive to reduce electricity** use at **peak times**;
- test REC’s advanced business systems to deliver innovation solutions; and
- measure the reductions in wholesale power costs that will be passed along directly to pilot participants and indirectly to all member-owners.

Participants will be notified the night before a peak event through text, email or social media. They would be paid **75 cents** for every **kilowatt-hour** of electricity not used during specified hours compared with what they would normally use during those hours. They would not be required to participate in every instance.

“REC is very excited to propose the first **innovative rate pilot** of this type in **Virginia**,” David said. “We are hopeful that we will have a very successful test with **200 participants** in the **summer of 2020**, and the interest of our membership will be so robust that we can **expand significantly in year two**, potentially up to **1,000 member-participants**.”

-Report by Casey Hollins, Rappahannock Electric Cooperative Director of Communications and Public Relations.

Co-op Principles at Work

Community Electric Co-op 'Teams Up' for Hungry Families

Community Electric Cooperative (CEC) launched a successful and unique **holiday food drive**, teaming its associates with **Elevate Church** to raise **donations of non-perishable items for deserving families**.

Through the partnership, associates at CEC broke into **six teams** to compete to collect the **most non-perishable items**. CEC has a long history of **community partnerships** and hopes to incorporate more opportunities in the coming year.

“CEC is committed to supporting the community and **hunger doesn’t take a break during the holidays**. As we enter a season where ‘community’ has greater meaning, this is such a beautiful way to honor our neighbors — through

teamwork and generosity,” said **Jessica Parr, manager of communications at Community Electric Cooperative**.



Teams were notified on **Nov. 25** and had until **12:30 p.m. on Dec. 19** to complete collecting items for the drive. A total of **39 CEC associates and 9 board members** participated.

The team to collect the most non-perishable food items presented the total of **2,075 items** to **Pastor Thomas-Steele Carr with Elevate Church**.

“As we look to a motivating New Year, I cannot think of a **better way to close out 2019** than to **partner with the community**

The winning team from Community Electric’s food drive, shown here, presented 2,075 items to Elevate Church.

that means so much to us at CEC. We are grateful for our associates’ support in helping **to fight hunger this holiday season and throughout the coming year**,” said **Steve Harmon, CEO and president of Community Electric Cooperative**.

“We are honored to participate in such an offering and greatly look forward to get the food collected into the hands of people who need it,” said Pastor Carr.

-Report by Jessica Parr, Manager of Communications, Community Electric Cooperative.

Co-op People

SVEC's Ron Shickel Reflects on Long Career

After almost **35 years** at **Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative (SVEC)**, **Manager of Telecommunications Infrastructure Ron Shickel** worked his last day at the co-op on **Dec. 20, 2019**, with **Jan. 2, 2020** as his last “official” day.

Though Ron **had his sights set** on working at the cooperative from an early time, getting the job **didn’t come easily**.

“I wanted to get back to the Valley around 1981 and called SVEC from my home in Connecticut. I always thought that was a place I’d like to work. Unfortunately, I was told that there were no job openings.”

Several years later, Ron found his way back to the area. While running an errand, he bumped into an acquaintance who told him that **SVEC had an opening**.

“My first day at the co-op was a very cold morning. I was so worried about my truck not starting and once I got to work, I had to sit and wait because of chaos caused by the weather,” Ron said. “I remember thinking, what have I gotten myself into?” A great career, as it turned out.

During his career, he has seen **tremendous changes** in technology, equipment and processes, especially with computers and their evolution from **mainframes to terminals to PCs**.

“It’s interesting to see how at the beginning of my career, consumers were sending in meter readings and now they are requesting information using technology,” he said, noting one major change.

In summing up his long career, Ron says, “One thing I can say, I’ve always been proud to be an employee of SVEC.”

Vice President of Engineering & Operations Greg Rogers said that Ron **served the cooperative faithfully** for the **three-and-a-half decades** that he was there. “Ron served in the unique area of communications, which has grown from an important to a critical element over his career. I always found that Ron brought genuine caring, engineering interest and laughter to each workday.”

Reda Eye, Administrative Assistant for Engineering & Operations, has worked with Ron for **35 years**. “He would always make me laugh, even if I wasn’t in a good mood or having a bad day. He can tell jokes like nobody I’ve ever seen. He also has a serious side, though, and I could go to him with any kind of concern or issue, whether it be from home or work.”

Ron said in his retirement, he will be **spending time with family and wife, Donna Lou**. He said traveling to “bucket list” locations, including out west, **Alaska and Hawaii**, is in his plans. He also wants to do more **getaways of two to three days** and **tinker around the house**.

Greg summed it up best for SVEC employees when he said, “I wish Ron well in his much-deserved retirement and we will certainly miss him.”

-Report by Cammie Tutwiler, Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative Public Relations Representative.



Ron Shickel retired earlier this month after 35 years of service. "I've always been proud to be an employee of SVEC," he says.

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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