

January 31, 2020

Virginia General Assembly

A Show of Co-op Strength on Legislative Day

There's strength in numbers and nowhere was that more evident than in Richmond on Jan. 28 as about **120 electric cooperative leaders** from across Virginia gathered for the annual **Legislative Day** sponsored by the **Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives**.

Co-op CEOs, directors and key staffers advanced from office to office in the **Pocahontas Building**, home to the General Assembly while its office building is under reconstruction.

"We were delighted at the turnout for this very important day of interacting with members of the General Assembly and delivering our position on important issues and our positive message about how the cooperative business model is benefitting their constituents and all Virginians," said **Richard G. Johnstone Jr.**, president and CEO of the VMD Association.

Throughout the day, co-op representatives briefed lawmakers and their key aides about issues in which their systems are actively engaged, such as **renewable energy development** and facilitating the **expansion of broadband to rural Virginia**.

"It's an important day for us in Richmond to meet with our delegates and senators and make sure they understand the importance of some of the legislation for the co-ops," said **Gary Wood**, president and CEO of Central Virginia Electric Cooperative.

Key subjects for 2020 include a change that will make it easier to deliver high-speed internet by enabling providers to use **existing utility easements for broadband expansion**.



Del. Roslyn Tyler of Jarratt (center) and her aide Belinda Astrop (2nd from left) meet with board members and staffers from Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative including (from l) Director Brandon Hudson; President and CEO John C. Lee Jr.; Director Bob Jones; and staffers Michele Taylor and Priscilla Lawson Whirley.



Del. John Avoli of Staunton and the 20th House District (center left) meets with a Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative delegation of SVEC Board Chairman Larry Howdyshell (l), and staffers Preston Knight and Morgan Slaven.

The House bill is H.B. 831, patroned by **Del. Jennifer Carroll Foy**, and the Senate version is S.B. 794, patroned by **Sen. Lynwood Lewis**.

"These bills are about bringing certainty to broadband expansion issues," said **Sam Brumberg**, VMD Association Counsel, adding that they could facilitate **speedier broadband buildouts in rural areas**. Co-ops have built a **strong alliance** with other organizations in support of the action, he also noted.

Additionally, as legislators debate broad **energy reform issues**, cooperatives are urging them to recognize the landmark changes that co-ops made in **solar and renewable energy** during the 2019 General Assembly session.

Those successes include **increasing the net metering** in cooperative service territories to 5% as well as opening cooperative service territories to financing through **third-party power purchase agreements**.



Del. Terry Austin is flanked on Legislative Day by Craig-Botetourt Electric Cooperative Director James Huffman (l) and CBEC Interim General Manager Jeff Ahearn.

Andrew Vehorn, VMD vice president of governmental affairs, said it's important any reform package **preserves those gains and protects the unique status of co-ops**, especially in legislation that is more targeted toward investor-owned utilities.

Andrew and Sam added that an **educational effort is ongoing** as well, to share with elected officials more information about the member-owned, not-for-profit structure of electric cooperatives, since substantial turnover in the General Assembly in recent years means many delegates and senators **are not familiar with the cooperative business model**, or co-op issues.

"We inform them about how we are different," Andrew said. "Being an electric cooperative grounds us in the community. We are a much more valuable advocacy arm because of who we are and how we operate."

During Legislative Day, **co-ops got a positive response** in the offices they visited.

"I'm a huge supporter of Virginia's electric cooperatives because they're actually owned by the members," said **Sen. Joe Morrissey**, who met with a delegation from **Prince George Electric Cooperative**, headed by **Casey Logan**, its president and CEO.

Before the office visits, participants also heard from **Bob Holsworth**, a top Virginia political analyst and managing partner of **DecideSmart**. He predicted co-ops **could fare well** in the 2020 General Assembly because elected officials **like the consumer orientation** of co-ops.

Dr. Holsworth also stressed the need to **keep up with legislators year-round**. "It's important to talk about how you're going to relate to the legislature when members go home," he told co-op leaders at a breakfast briefing before they made their visits.



Casey Logan, president and CEO of Prince George Electric Cooperative, shares information with Sen. Joe Morrissey, who represents the Petersburg-Hopewell area in the 16th Senate District.

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

VMD Board Meeting

Association Celebrates 'Landmark Year,' Honors ACRE Successes



VMD Association Board Chair Bob Jones, who also serves on the Mecklenburg Electric Co-op Board, presides over the Association Board Meeting on Jan. 27.

Grassroots activism was front and center at the **January 27 meeting** of the **VMD Association Board of Directors**, as co-ops were recognized for their accomplishments in **political advocacy and activity**.

The board met at the Hilton Richmond Downtown in advance of **Legislative Day** to review Association policies and hear committee reports.

In his opening remarks, VMD Association President and CEO **Richard G. Johnstone Jr.** called 2019 "**a landmark year**" that included the opening of the **training center** in Palmyra, the lineworker electrification project in **Bolivia**, the most successful **Gaff-n-Go Rodeo** yet and the gala **75th Association celebration**.

The Association plans to build on the successes of 2019 by expanding its **training** offerings, stepping up its **print and digital** communications efforts and building **grassroots strength** in support of the co-op movement, Richard said.

Larry Howdysshell, board member at **Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative**, gave a report as chairman of the **Governmental Affairs Committee**. He said VMD member co-ops are working hard to advance members' interests in public affairs discussions and dominated attendance at the recent **Virginia Agribusiness Banquet**.

John C. Lee Jr., president and CEO of **Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative**, provided updates on behalf of the **CEO Advisory Committee** and the **Rodeo Committee**. John noted that the rodeo is changing its name from "lineman's" rodeo to "**lineworker's**" rodeo to reflect important changes in the composition of the workforce. The 2020 rodeo, scheduled for **May 15-16**, will have a **contractor division** for the first time, he added.



For the eighth consecutive year, Rappahannock Electric Co-op was honored for receiving the highest amount of ACRE contributions. Accepting the award is REC Board Member Linda Gray, who is congratulated by VMD Association CEO Richard Johnstone (l) and ACRE Committee Chair Dr. Frank Bacon, who also serves as Chair of Southside's Board.

Bob Jones, VMD board chairman and also chairman of the **Communications and Public Relations Committee**, noted positive developments in **ad revenue** for *Cooperative Living* magazine.

The first awards of the board meeting went to **Delaware Electric Cooperative** and **Powell Valley Electric Cooperative**. **Jeff Edwards**, president and CEO of Southside Electric Cooperative and Safety Committee chairman, recognized both systems with a **Certificate of Safety Achievement**.



Community Electric Cooperative repeated as the winner of the Virginia ACRE Cup for 2019. Proudly displaying the award is CEC Board Chair Jeannette Everett, who is joined by CEO Steve Harmon (r), and employee Evan Wagonsomer.

electric co-ops. Brian said the ACRE program set **record levels of financial participation** in Virginia, Maryland and Delaware in 2019, with similar growth expected this year. There was **strong participation** from VMD member system **directors and key staff**, with 13 of 14 cooperative boards at **100% participation**, Brian added.

For the eighth consecutive year, **Rappahannock Electric Cooperative** received special recognition for having received the **highest amount** of ACRE contributions. **Southside Electric Cooperative** had the **fastest-growing** ACRE campaign in 2019, with **Dr. Frank W. Bacon**, chairman of both the SEC board and the VMD ACRE Committee, accepting a plaque for the co-op's work.

Community Electric Cooperative repeated as the winner of the **2019 Virginia ACRE Cup** for having raised **more dollars per employee** than any other system in the state, which included having every CEC employee joining ACRE at the Century Club level. CEO **Steve Harmon**, Board Chairwoman **Jeannette Everett** and CEC employee **Evan Wagonsomer** accepted the award on behalf of the cooperative.

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

The award from the **National Rural Electric Cooperative Association** recognizes dedication to employee and public safety and commitment to regulatory compliance and loss control practices. Called the **Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program**, this national safety program is coordinated in partnership with statewide associations and utilizes a framework for continuous improvement to advance safety performance and culture.

The board also took in reports from several national cooperative organizations: **NRECA**, **CoBank**, **CFC**, **Federated Rural Electric Insurance**, the **Rural Utilities Service** and the **National Rural Telecommunications Cooperative**.

VMD Chief Operating Officer **Brian Mosier** gave an overview of the successful growth of co-op participation in **ACRE**, the Action Committee for Rural Electrification, which is the political arm of

Renewable Energy

DEC and Constellation Complete Solar Farm Expansion

Delaware Electric Cooperative (DEC) and **Constellation** have completed work to **nearly double** the size of the co-op's **Bruce A. Henry Solar Farm** in Sussex County.

Seventeen acres of new solar panels began producing clean, renewable energy for DEC members in **early January**.

Constellation, an Exelon company, built the **4.2-megawatt addition** to the solar farm. **More than 10,000 solar panels** were installed during the past several months and the expanded portion of the solar farm is expected to produce enough energy to **power 400 homes**.

DEC has agreed to **purchase the energy** produced, as well as the **renewable energy credits**, at the site for a stable, competitive price over the next 25 years.

According to DEC President and CEO **Bill Andrew**, "We partnered with Constellation because they have a proven track record of building state-of-the-art solar generating stations across the country. The addition to our solar farm will produce clean energy for cooperative members for decades to come. We are committed to providing our members with affordable power while also reducing our carbon footprint."



New solar panel arrays have come online at Delaware Electric Cooperative's Bruce A. Henry Solar Farm in Sussex County.

The **Bruce A. Henry Solar Farm** became operational in **2013** and consisted of **23 acres** of solar panels near Georgetown. The **combined 40 acres** of solar panels are now producing enough energy to power **nearly 1,000 homes**.

By offsetting traditional fossil fuel electric generation, the **expanded solar array** is expected to prevent the release of **3,600 metric tons** of carbon dioxide annually.

"We're pleased to help Delaware Electric Cooperative implement this clean energy solution and increase renewable supply for its members," said **Brendon Quinlivan**, Constellation's executive director for distributed energy origination. "We commend DEC on proactively making a positive environmental impact by supporting the adoption of renewable energy."

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

Co-op Innovation

Getting a Charge Out of REC Electric Vehicle Program

Rappahannock Electric Cooperative (REC) is making a statement about its interest in **electric vehicles**.

REC recently filed an application with the **State Corporation Commission** seeking approval of an **innovative, 2-year pilot program** that would offer a **financial incentive** for member-owners to **charge their electric vehicles** during times that result in **lower costs for the co-op**.

The program would be **the first of its kind in Virginia**.

Experts project that a typical EV owner will use **approximately 300 kilowatt-hours per month** to charge a car. Based on that estimate, an REC member participating in the EV charging pilot would receive a **credit of \$12 per month or \$144 per year** on their electric bill, further **reducing the cost of "refueling"** their EV, while **helping REC manage its wholesale power costs**.

Research shows that **approximately 80%** of electric vehicle charging **occurs at home**. If that charging occurs during peak times, it could require significant infrastructure investments, **leading to higher costs for all consumers**.

To date, most utility EV rate programs require **an expensive second utility meter** specifically for the EV charging equipment, or require all electricity used in the home **to be on a time-of-use type rate**.

REC's pilot proposes to utilize a **lower-cost technology solution** by using data from the **EV's smart charger** to determine **when and how much electricity** is used for **EV charging**. The program would initially be limited to **200 participants** who would receive a **4 cents-per-kWh credit** when they charge their electric vehicles exclusively during the hours of **9 p.m. to 5 a.m.** and **10 a.m. to 2 p.m.**

REC expects the SCC to seek public comment on the proposal, and **to decide** on the pilot program **later this year**. REC member-owners interested in the program can learn more at myrec.coop/evcharging.

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

Co-op Innovation

BARC Adopts Energy Sustainability Plan

BARC Electric Cooperative is taking a lead role in **carbon-neutral energy sales**.

The cooperative announced on **Jan. 20** that it **has adopted a sustainability plan** to serve as its roadmap toward **carbon-neutral energy sales**. BARC is working to accomplish the goal **by 2035**, recognizing its duty to lead by example on the issue of climate change by **eliminating carbon** in its energy sales.

"We are a proven leader in the Commonwealth in offering new and innovative renewable energy solutions for our consumers," said BARC CEO **Michael Keyser**. "Developing a roadmap toward carbon-neutrality is just the next step in serving the needs of our members and combating climate change. It could not come at a better time as our Solarize BARC program kicks off this spring."

Announced in December 2019, **Solarize BARC** will be the cornerstone of **BARC's sustainability plan**, providing a combination of **utility-scale, rooftop and community solar programs**, as well as **EV charging and battery storage**, to meet each member's needs.

BARC intends the sustainability plan to be a **living document** that is continuously revisited and updated to reflect changes in **technology, energy markets and advancements in the renewable energy sector**. More information is at www.barcelectric.com/pdf/SustainabilityPlan.pdf.

-Report by Tish Blackwell, BARC Communications Specialist.

Co-op People

Mike Keyser Appointed to Virginia Broadband Advisory Council

BARC Electric Cooperative CEO **Mike Keyser** has a new role on **expanding access to broadband** in rural areas.

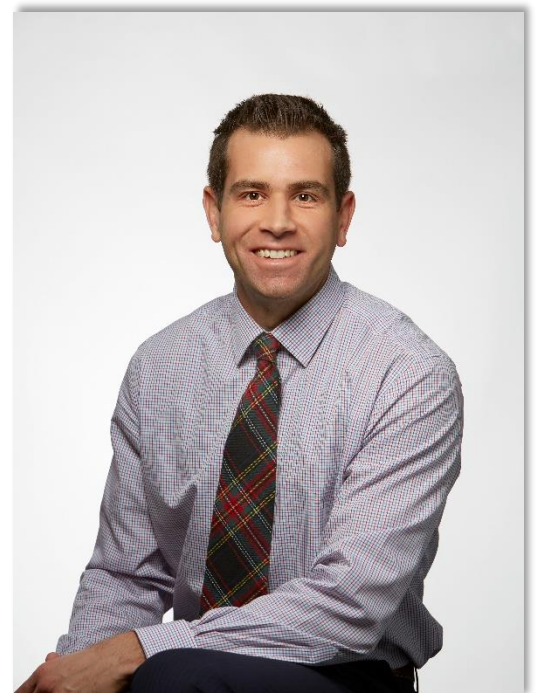
On Jan. 3, **Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam** appointed Mike to the **Virginia Broadband Advisory Council**. The council was established to advise the governor on **policy and funding priorities** to expedite deployment and reduce the cost of **broadband access in Virginia**.

The council is composed of **eleven members** and aligns with Northam's initiative to **expand rural internet service** to populations in Virginia currently in need.

"Being appointed to this advisory council gives electric cooperatives a seat at the table to establish policies that will move the Governor's rural broadband initiative forward," Mike said. "I look forward to working with our government and business leaders to ensure the Commonwealth is headed toward a connected Virginia for all."

Mike also works with the **Commonwealth Connect** team established by Gov. Northam in 2018 to create a comprehensive effort in achieving **universal broadband access** for all Virginians.

Additionally, Mike was appointed to the **GO Virginia Region 8 Board** in 2019, giving cooperatives and BARC's electric and broadband service areas a voice in **economic development issues** where broadband plays a **huge role**.



BARC CEO Mike Keyser said he looks forward "to working with our government and business leaders...toward a connected Virginia for all."

-Report by Tish Blackwell, BARC Communications Specialist.

News About Members of the VMD Cooperative Family

- Longtime Association senior manager **Bill Sherrod**, editor of *Cooperative Living*, continues to deal with a serious illness and welcomes cards and notes of encouragement. His home 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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