

February 14, 2020

Co-op Honors

Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative Again Named a 'Best Place to Work'



Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative employees accept the "2020 Best Places to Work in Virginia" award. From left are Peter Burke, president of Best Companies Group; MEC employees Dustin Francis, Carolyn Glass, Shelley Snead, and Sherry Martin; and Bernie Niemeier, president and publisher of Virginia Business magazine.

For the **third** consecutive year, **Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative (MEC)** has been named as one of the "**Best Places to Work in Virginia**" by **Virginia Business Magazine** and Best Companies Group. MEC President and CEO **John C. Lee, Jr.**, says, "I cannot adequately express how incredibly proud we are of this recognition! The Best Places to Work in Virginia list is made up of 100 companies, and in 2018 our cooperative **ranked No. 18** in the Medium Employer Category (100-249 U.S. employees). Last year we were **ranked at No. 15**, and we were elated to learn that our 2020 ranking **has risen to No. 4!** It is very gratifying for MEC to be recognized in such a prestigious way."

The statewide survey and awards program is designed by **Virginia Business Magazine** and Best Companies Group to **identify, recognize and honor** the best places of employment in Virginia, benefiting the state's **economy, workforce and businesses**. To be considered for participation, companies have to fulfill the following eligibility requirements:

- Be a for-profit, not-for-profit business or government entity;
- Be a publicly or privately held business;
- Have a facility in the state of Virginia;
- Have at least 15 employees working in the state of Virginia; and
- Be in business a minimum of 1 year.



Companies from across the state entered the **two-part survey** process to determine the Best Places to Work in Virginia. The first part consisted of evaluating each nominated company's **workplace policies, practices, philosophy, systems and demographics**. This part of the process was worth approximately **25 percent** of the total evaluation. The second part consisted of an **employee survey** to measure the **employee experience**. This part of the process was worth approximately **75 percent** of the total evaluation. The combined scores determined the **top companies** and the **final ranking**. Best Companies Group managed the overall registration and survey process in Virginia and also analyzed the data and used their expertise to determine the final ranking.

John, who has served as **president and CEO** of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative for **12 years**, states, "We highly value our excellent employees and are thankful that we are viewed by them as a great place to work. I congratulate MEC, its board of directors, management staff and outstanding employees for working together as a successful team to be one of the best places to work as they proficiently strive to exceed the expectations of our members."

For more information on the **Best Places to Work in Virginia** program, visit **BestPlacesToWorkVA.com**.

-Report by Debbie Blue Winn, Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative Member and Public Relations Specialist.

Co-op Leaders

General Assembly Recognizes Elnora Tompkins' Service

A long-time **electric cooperative leader** has received recognition for her service from the **Virginia General Assembly**.

A resolution commending **Elnora F. Tompkins**, a retired educator and former member of the **Northern Neck Electric Cooperative (NNEC) board**, passed the House and Senate in January.

House Joint Resolution 141, sponsored by **Delegate Margaret B. Ransone**, cites Mrs. Tompkins' career of "exceptional service," which culminated in her receiving the **Distinguished Service Award** from the **Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives** in 2019.

In part, the General Assembly resolution reads:

"WHEREAS, among her many other honors and accolades, Elnora Tompkins was named as an Unsung Hero by the Black Business and Professional Coalition of the Northern Neck and received the Liberty Bell Award from the Northern Neck Bar Association; now, therefore, be it

"RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commends Elnora F. Tompkins on receiving the Distinguished Service Award from the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives; and, be it

"RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Elnora F. Tompkins as an expression of the General Assembly's admiration for her exceptional service to students in the Northern Neck and contributions to communities throughout Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware."

Mrs. Tompkins was a **teacher** and **guidance counselor** in **Westmoreland County** for many years and served on the **NNEC board** for 32 years, 26 of them as **secretary-treasurer**.

Congratulations once again are in order for **Elnora Tompkins!**

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

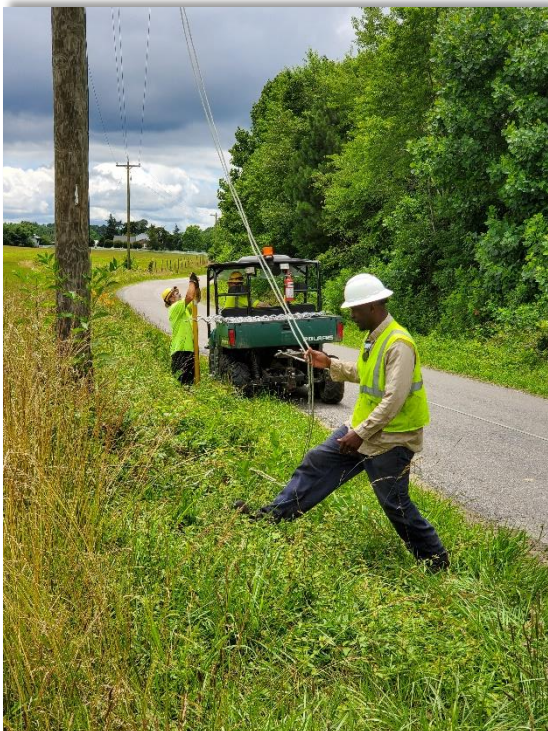


Elnora Tompkins is shown receiving the 2019 Distinguished Service Award from the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives with NNEC President and CEO Greg White.

Co-op News

RURALBAND Gets Boost: Surry County Awarded \$2.25 Million for Broadband

Surry County and Prince George Electric Cooperative's subsidiary, RURALBAND, constitute one of 12 broadband expansion projects awarded a grant from the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) on Jan. 22.



A crew pulls cable as part of Prince George Electric Cooperative's RURALBAND fiber-to-the-home service.

Gov. Ralph Northam announced that Surry County will receive **\$2.25 million** in the form of a grant through VATI to provide **broadband service** to **1,253 homes**. The VATI program provides targeted funding to extend service to areas that **are unserved** by a broadband provider.

Del. Emily Brewer of Surry County's 64th District stated, "The announcement of broadband expansion is very exciting news for the citizens of Surry County. Since I was appointed to the Governor's Broadband Advisory Council, it has been my mission to secure funding for our region. Students, families, and small businesses deserve quality access to broadband services."

"Prince George Electric Cooperative has been at the forefront of the broadband initiative," stated PGEC Board Chairman Paul Brown. "We are very pleased Gov. Northam has made broadband a priority in his administration, and Virginians will reap the rewards of this investment for years to come."

Prince George Electric Cooperative serves Prince George, Surry, Sussex, Dinwiddie and Isle of Wight counties. "PGEC's revolutionary high-speed internet has been exceedingly well received throughout our service territory. We've been able to witness firsthand how broadband internet access can help to improve our rural communities," said Casey Logan, PGEC president and CEO.

The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development administers VATI. The **\$18.3 million in grants** will go to **localities and broadband authorities** to provide "last-mile" fiber to **unserved communities**.

“The award of the VATI grant funds to bring broadband access to Surry County is a huge win for the county’s economic development efforts. We look forward to working with PGEC in providing this vital utility to meet the social, economic, educational and business needs of this community,” says **Robert Elliot**, chairman of the board of supervisors of **Surry County**.

-Report by Renee Chapline, Prince George Electric Cooperative Vice President of Communications and Government Affairs.

Co-op News

Mecklenburg Receives Funding for EMPOWER Broadband

EMPOWER Broadband is taking **another step forward** and that’s good news for **Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative (MEC)** members in Halifax County.

On Jan. 22, **Gov. Ralph Northam** announced support from the **Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI)** to help **EMPOWER expand its high-speed internet service** across Southside Virginia.

The grant of **\$710,514** was part of about **\$18.3 million** that the governor announced for **a dozen projects** across Virginia.

“Broadband is a necessity for communities to attract business, for students to use educational resources, and for Virginians to receive healthcare through telemedicine,” **Gov. Northam** said at an announcement ceremony in Charles City.

John C. Lee Jr., president and CEO of MEC stated, “Our high-speed internet subsidiary, **EMPOWER Broadband**, recently received just over \$710,000 in grant funding through the Department of Housing and Community Development’s VATI program. With this grant, **EMPOWER will deploy fiber** to the premises for **hundreds of homes in Halifax County**. This strategic expansion extends the reach of MEC’s fiber backbone to **the doorstep of our Members** who have **been forgotten** and intentionally overlooked **by existing broadband providers**. Sadly, our rural communities have been once again relegated to receive subpar service because of where we live. **But when no one else would do the work and provide the service ... we will!**

“Proudly, this grant represents the culmination of months of work and a strengthening relationship with the Halifax County Board of Supervisors and the county administration. Such partnerships across our service territory are pivotal as **we transform our communities** and in leveraging these **critical funding opportunities**,” John said.

-Report by Debbie Blue Winn, Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative Member and Public Relations Specialist.

Co-op Firsts

Northern Neck Electric Cooperative Makes History, Employs Virginia’s First Female Electric Cooperative Lineworker

There’s more to Northern Neck resident **Genevie Boarman** than derring-do and dimples.

The 24-year-old, who was featured on the cover of **January’s Cooperative Living**, is now officially scaling new heights as **Virginia’s first female electric cooperative lineworker**.

Northern Neck Electric Cooperative added Genevie to its workforce as of Feb. 10.

A graduate of **Southside Virginia Community College’s Power Line Worker Training School**, Genevie was hired as an **apprentice lineworker**. In her new position, Genevie will assist with substation repair, installing transformers and regulators, setting and replacing utility poles, repairing and constructing overhead and underground primary lines as well as secondary lines, and working outages to restore power, among other things.

“We are pleased to welcome Genevie into the Northern Neck Electric Cooperative family. As the first female cooperative lineworker in Virginia, she has demonstrated that through hard work and training, anyone, regardless of gender, can reach their goals and help their community by working to keep the lights on,” said **Greg White, Northern Neck Electric Cooperative’s president & CEO**.

“Words cannot express how very proud the entire Southside Virginia Community College community was when we saw our Power Line Worker Training School graduate, Genevie Boarman, on the cover of the *January Cooperative Living*. Laura Emery did a great job capturing the essence of our program and the amazing journey of Genevie in her article, ‘Aiming High.’ Our training program is top-notch and would not be available without the support of the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives,” said **Quentin R. Johnson, Ph.D., president of Southside Virginia Community College**.

Said Genevie, "I'm excited about my new career path. I appreciated the *Cooperative Living* article. A lot of people told me they really enjoyed it."

Genevie being featured in *Cooperative Living* raised awareness on how the male-dominated profession is evolving. As a result, the 33-member **Gaff-n-Go Committee and Working Group** announced Feb. 6 that it will **change the name** of its annual rodeo event from Gaff-n-Go Lineman's Rodeo to **Gaff-n-Go Lineworker's Rodeo**.



Virginia's first female electric cooperative lineworker, Genevie Boarman, said of her hiring by Northern Neck Electric Cooperative, "I'm excited about my new career path."

Said **John C. Lee, Jr., chairman of the Gaff-n-Go Committee and President & CEO of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative**, "First, let me extend my sincere congratulations to Genevie for her very significant accomplishment in becoming our very first Virginia Electric Cooperative female lineworker. Her hard work at our Power Line Worker Training School helped her earn an employment offer from a cooperative in the Commonwealth and she is now a member of the great team that serves the members of Northern Neck Electric Cooperative.

"There is no doubt that this is an appropriate time to rename our annual rodeo event from the lineman's rodeo to the lineworker's rodeo. The number of female lineworkers in our industry is growing and we welcome and encourage their participation in our annual competition. The mission to provide our members with safe and reliable electric power knows no gender bias and neither does our Gaff-n-Go Lineworker's Rodeo. We look forward to seeing Genevie at the rodeo competing and representing Northern Neck Electric Cooperative."

-Report by Laura Emery, VMD Association Field Editor.

Co-op Training

Be Sure to Register Soon: The Spring RoundUp Is Just Around the Corner!

For the first time, the VA, MD & DE Association is offering its own **spring director school**, formally known as the **Spring RoundUp**. The **Hilton Norfolk The Main** will be the setting for the **two-and-a-half days** of director training from **March 22 through March 24**.

Day one will be a half-day class on **Robert's Rules of Order – A Primer**, facilitated by Association Counsel, **Sam Brumberg**. Sam will take directors on a journey through the basics of **parliamentary rules**, showing how rules can be used to **streamline procedures**, ensure that **all voices are heard**, and shield cooperatives **from liability**. From the boardroom to the annual meeting, Robert's Rules and other parliamentary procedures are designed to be **beneficial and helpful** to the Cooperative.

Day two will be the **NRECA class, BLC 953.1, Improving Board Decision-Making Quality**. **Molly McPherson** will be back to teach this **brand-new class**. At a time when cooperative governance is **under scrutiny**, boards are looking for ways to demonstrate that their decisions are grounded in **fair process** and with **appropriate objectivity** and **due diligence**. Recognizing, and avoiding, the common pitfalls of decision-making can **increase the likelihood** of the board making a good decision while **decreasing the risks** of making bad ones. This course delves into the **hurdles, traps and minefields** that can **negatively impact boardroom decision-making** and provides strategies for **how to counterbalance them**.

Day three will be **another NRECA class, CCD 2630, Strategic Planning**. Another favorite, **Kevin Sump**, will facilitate this class. If it has been **more than five years** since you've taken this class, you'll want to **sign up for a refresher**. Boards have ultimate responsibility for ensuring and evaluating the **long-term health** of the organization. They help fulfill this duty through **strategic thinking**, identifying goals through **strategic planning** and authorizing the appropriate allocation of resources through the adoption of **financial policies, budget review and approval** and monitoring management's progress toward **strategic goals**. This course teaches directors how to participate effectively in **strategic thinking and planning processes**.

RoundUp schedule:

SUNDAY, MARCH 22, 2020

12:30 p.m. Registration Desk Opens
1:00 – 5:00 p.m. Robert's Rules of Order – A Primer
5:30 – 6:30 p.m. Welcome Hospitality

Dinner on your own

MONDAY, MARCH 23, 2020

7:30 a.m. Registration Desk Opens
7:30 – 8:30 a.m. Breakfast
8:30 – 12:00 p.m. BLC 953.1 Improving Board Decision-Making Quality
12:00 – 1:00 p.m. Lunch
1:00 – 4:15 p.m. BLC 953.1 Improving Board Decision-Making Quality (cont.)
5:00 – 6:00 p.m. Hospitality

Dinner on your own

TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 2020

7:00 a.m. Registration Desk Opens
7:00 – 8:00 a.m. Breakfast
8:00 – 12:00 p.m. CCD 2630 Strategic Planning
12:00 – 1:00 p.m. Lunch
1:00 – 3:45 p.m. CCD 2630 Strategic Planning (cont.)

The deadline to register **has been extended to Friday, February 21**. Be sure to talk to your cooperative's **executive assistant as soon as possible about registering!**

-Report by Brandon Burton, VMD Association Director of Continuing Education.

Co-op People

Phil Jarvis Earns Certified Safety Professional Designation

Phil Jarvis, manager of safety services for the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives, recently **achieved accreditation** as a **Certified Loss Control Professional**.

Phil, a Lexington resident, completed **an intensive program** in electric utility safety and loss control co-sponsored by the **National Rural Electric Cooperative Association** and the **National Utility Training and Safety Education Association**.

The program is designed to instruct participants in many areas related to electric utility industry safety.

"Phil is now one of an elite, growing number of safety professionals who have achieved this designation," said **Perron W. Nicholas**, manager, NRECA University Programs, in making the announcement.

Phil said the credential involved **a lot of night and weekend work** but was worth it and will help him in his duties with the electric cooperatives' training department. He also has been **a lineworker in Ohio** and at **BARC Electric Cooperative** in Virginia and regularly shares an incident involving electrical contact in which he was involved.



VMD Association CEO Richard Johnstone (r) presents the framed CLCP certificate to Phil Jarvis, VMD Association manager of safety services.

The program requires participants to complete **a rigorous series of seminars and tests, a 30-hour occupational safety course** and a **detailed final project**. The program consists of **four week-long sessions** designed to challenge and educate participants in new, innovative techniques, with **annual follow-up courses**.

Congratulations to Phil, on earning this designation!

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

Social Media

View Valentine's Day Tribute to Co-op Employees

Through the *Cooperative Living* Facebook page, we asked our followers to tell us **why they love their local electric cooperative**. We received **more than 50 comments** on the post, which inspired us to create a **special Valentine's Day video** paying tribute to the great work our Virginia, Maryland and Delaware electric cooperative employees do **every day** serving their member-consumers. You can view the **"We Love Our Electric Cooperative"** video here: www.facebook.com/cooperativeliving/videos/183619352973852/.

-Report by Laura Emery, VMD Association Field Editor.

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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