

A regular update for leaders, members and friends of
the VA-MD-DE Association of Electric Cooperatives

from Richard G. Johnstone, Jr. | President & CEO



CO-OP NEWS



Left: CVEC President and CEO Gary Wood discusses the expansion of Firefly Fiber Broadband throughout Buckingham County. Below: From left, CVEC Director Brian Bates, CVEC President and CEO Gary Wood and Don Matthews, vice chairman of the Buckingham County Board of Supervisors, share a light moment at the award announcement.

Access to high-speed internet service got a little closer to reality for underserved Virginians Feb. 28 with a \$28 million federal infusion into Central Virginia Electric Cooperative's Firefly Fiber Broadband initiative.

More than 200 co-op leaders, elected officials, dignitaries and members packed the Buckingham Agricultural Resource Network building at the announcement ceremony.

The loan and grant combination comes from U.S. Department of Agriculture's ReConnect program, which targets rural areas that lack access to broadband service. It represents a big shot in the arm for Firefly, which will extend broadband to all 37,000 CVEC members as part of a 5-year, \$120 million project.

"It's a tremendous day in the history of Central Virginia Electric Cooperative," said Gary Wood, president and CEO of CVEC. "This project, this type of award, means so many things in so many ways to us."

The funding will cover work across 704 square miles, said Beth Green, Virginia state director for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development unit. In line for service as a result of the money are 17,023 households; 35 pre-subscribed businesses; 20 pre-subscribed farms; 15 educational facilities; 15 critical community facilities and six health care centers in a 13-county area.

"High-speed broadband internet connectivity, or e-connectivity, is essential to economic development, quality of life and overall prosperity in any community," Green said.

George Goodwin, legislative advisor to State Sen. Mark Peake, who represents Buckingham, called the award "a game changer."

"In my lifetime, computers have gone from a mystery to a nicety, and today it is necessity. We depend on it for communication or for education, for business and economic development," Goodwin said.

Don Matthews, vice chairman of the Buckingham County Board of Supervisors, echoed similar sentiments.



"I'm lost for words actually," said Matthews, a lifelong farmer. "This is going to help the citizens of Buckingham County and our school division."

Gary Wood said Firefly expects to have broadband up and running at four substations: Curdsville in Buckingham County; Cartersville in Cumberland and Goochland counties; Kidd's Store in Fluvanna County; and Stonewall in Appomattox County.

He commended the CVEC board for its foresight in approving the Firefly program in November 2017, saying it "stepped up to the plate" to provide a permanent high-speed internet solution for all members.

"Building fiber optic is the answer long term to high-speed internet and that's what we're focused on with Firefly. We're going to provide world-class service and we're going to do it at really competitive prices," Gary said.

Other speakers included Harry Bryant, chairman of the Buckingham County Board of Supervisors; Stephen Harvey of U.S. Rep. Denver Riggleman's office; Karen Mask of U.S. Rep. Abigail Spanberger's office; and Kyle Rosner, a broadband advisor to Gov. Ralph Northam.

—Report by Steven Johnson, Editor, Cooperative Living magazine.

CO-OP NEWS

PGEC Well-Represented at Broadband ‘Conversation’

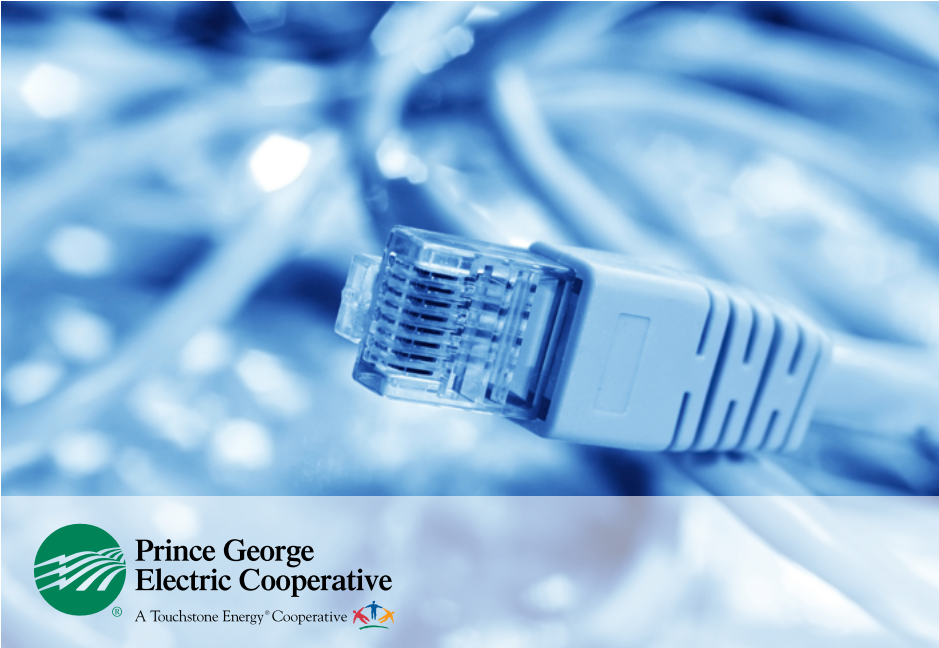
Prince George Electric Cooperative was well-represented among the stakeholders at a recent U.S. House Energy & Commerce Committee field hearing on broadband issues.

Renee Chapline, director of government affairs at PGEC, spoke about the co-op’s RURALBAND project during the Feb. 20 session at the Prince George Wellness Center in Disputanta, hosted by U.S. Reps. A. Donald McEachin of the 4th District and Abigail Spanberger of the 7th District.

The “Conversation on Rural Broadband” was aimed at bringing local officials, community leaders and broadband advocates together to discuss federal solutions to challenges **expanding access to unserved areas**. Geoffrey Starks, a member of the **Federal Communications Commission**, was among the participants.

“We believe high-speed internet access in our rural communities is a priority. Broadband access for our service territory’s homes and businesses isn’t a luxury—it’s a necessity,” said PGEC President and CEO Casey Logan.

“Today’s conversation with rural broadband experts and stakeholders from Prince George County proves the power and possibility of solution-building between federal, state, and local government, and offers a successful blueprint for future collaboration to provide broadband to unserved and underserved communities throughout the country,” Rep. McEachin said.



Added Rep. Spanberger: “Access to opportunity in America shouldn’t be dictated by zip code ... Today’s conversation on rural broadband in Congressman McEachin’s district was an opportunity to put our heads together and discuss how we can expand broadband access here in Central Virginia.”

Also at the conference were Evan Feinman, chief broadband advisor to Gov. Ralph Northam; and Kenyada McLeod, assistant professor at John Tyler Community College.

–Report by Brooke Hochstetter, Marketing Specialist, Prince George Electric Cooperative.

PGEC to Expand Broadband in Surry in Partnership with Dominion

Thousands of residents in rural parts of Surry County could receive access to high-speed internet under an agreement signed by Prince George Electric Cooperative and Dominion Energy Virginia.

The partnership marks the **first time** a utility has joined with a cooperative to **expand broadband access** in Virginia. The agreement would extend access to about 4,500 Dominion Energy customers and 2,200 PGEC member-consumers in Surry County who lack access to broadband.

“We are excited to have Dominion Energy partner with PGEC on this exciting opportunity to bring high-speed internet to a beautiful waterfront community in need of access for education and economic development growth,” said Casey Logan, president and CEO of Prince George Electric Cooperative.

Dominion Energy will serve as the “middle mile” provider by allowing RURALBAND, a wholly owned subsidiary of PGEC, to lease fiber and provide last-mile Fiber to the Home service. The memorandum of understanding details how the parties would work together on the project, which would be filed with the State Corporation Commission later this year for regulatory approval.



“This partnership brings rural Surry County into the modern communications age, bridging a vital utility gap through reliable high-speed broadband services to residents and businesses, essential to Surry’s social and economic prosperity,” said acting Surry County Administrator Melissa Rollins. “We appreciate the partnership and commitment by Dominion Energy and PGEC to bring broadband access to Surry and other rural Virginia communities.”

–Report by Brooke Hochstetter, Marketing Specialist, Prince George Electric Cooperative.

SPOTLIGHT ON CO-OPS

National Utility Conference to Highlight Electric Co-ops

Have questions about smart energy?

The Smart Electric Power Alliance has answers. The VMD Association and ODEC are collaborating with the Alliance on a special co-op-only experience as part of the SEPA Utility Conference.



Smart Electric Power Alliance

The “Regional Electric Cooperative Strategic, Beneficial Electrification Exchange” is scheduled for **Wednesday, May 6** in **Charlotte, N.C.**, as part of the broader conference that will run from **May 4-6**.

It’s a chance for conference attendees to go deeper on the unique challenges and opportunities of working with clean and distributed energy resources at an electric cooperative. It’s also a chance to **network with peers** from other utilities, exchange ideas and hear how **VMD, ODEC, and North and South Carolina co-ops** are addressing their clean energy goals.

The conference will provide ideas to hit clean energy goals, 17 hours of networking, exclusive industry case studies and a wealth of peer-to-peer learning. Jump the “clean tech learning curve” by attending sessions such as:

- Distributed Energy Resource Revenue Opportunities for Utilities and DER Integration
- Utility Electric Vehicle Rates, Tariffs and Incentives
- Integration of Customer-Owned Grid-Edge Devices

Get \$100 off registration with code **CTT100** when you [register](#) before April 1st. Once you indicate you are a cooperative member during registration, you will be able to RSVP for the **free Regional Electric Cooperative Strategic, Beneficial Electrification Exchange**. Visit <http://bit.ly/39cvsni> to register and learn more.

SEPA’s mission is “to facilitate the electric power industry’s smart transition to a clean and modern energy future through education, research, standards and collaboration.” Its more than **1,000 members** include over **700 utilities**.

If you have any questions about the event, please contact Ranya Shannon from SEPA at rshannon@sepapower.org.

–Report by Steven Johnson, Editor, Cooperative Living magazine.

CO-OP FUTURE LEADERS

REC Youths Visit General Assembly

Rappahannock Electric Cooperative’s Youth Tour provides local students with a once-in-a-lifetime experience to see their state government in action.

On February 13, Kaylan Campbell, Madison County; Jose Cerritos-Martinez, Culpeper County; Nicholas Coates, Madison County; Tommy Garloch, Spotsylvania County; Cindy Gonzalez-Ramirez, Greene County; Nick Goudeau, Culpeper County; Jerry Morris, Greene County; and Henry Wood, Rappahannock County toured the General Assembly building, visiting with each of their **House of Delegates** members.

The students were able to learn about the legislative process and current issues being addressed by each delegate.



REC’s Youth Tour contingent poses in front of the statue of George Washington in the rotunda of the Virginia State Capitol.

The group viewed the beginning of the day’s session in the **House Gallery** and were recognized from the House floor by **Del. Bobby Orrock**. Following their meeting with local delegates, they toured the **Virginia State Capitol**, learning about its history and its importance to both the state of Virginia and the United States.

The students met with **Del. Buddy Fowler** of the 55th District; **Bobby Orrock** of the 54th District; **Nick Freitas** of the 30th District and **Michael Webert** of the 18th District.

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

CO-OP HONORS

MEC's Safety Coordinator
Receives National Certification
as Loss Control Professional

Matt Shaw, Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative's Safety and Security Coordinator, has completed an intensive electric utility safety and loss control accreditation program. The Certified Loss Control Professional program is structured to guide the Utility Safety Professional to manage workplace safety and ensure the safekeeping of the cooperative's resources.

A top goal of the Certified Loss Control Professional is to advance and ensure a **safe work environment** for utility workers, the cooperative's members and the public in general. Avoiding workplace accidents prevents down time and ultimately keeps utility rates as low as possible.

Safety and Loss Control participants go through **four, week-long sessions** that are designed to challenge and educate participants in new, innovative safety techniques. Participants must also maintain their certificate by attending annual courses to maintain a continuing knowledge of **best in class safety techniques** for the industry.

MEC Board Chairman **David J. Jones** presented Matt his certificate during the February MEC board meeting and congratulated him on behalf of the full board and senior staff. Matt is one of only **a few electric utility professionals nationwide** who will receive this certification during 2020.

"Matt was in the final stages of completing this important certification when he came to MEC just over a year ago. Safety is our highest priority at MEC, and we commend him for the hard work and dedication he has put into completing the program and for expanding his knowledge in the safety field," said MEC President and CEO John C. Lee Jr. "His work at our cooperative has enhanced MEC's already exceptional safety program and this certification will be valuable to our organization as we guard against complacency and continue our efforts to provide the safest working conditions possible for MEC's most valuable resource, our outstanding employees."



Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative Board Chairman David Jones (right) congratulates Matt Shaw on his achievement of completing the Certified Loss Control Professional accreditation program.

A **Marine Corps veteran**, Matt began his electric industry career in 1990 as an **apprentice lineman**. From there, he advanced to **lead lineman**, a position in which he served for more than 20 years. During his career, Matt has spent thousands of hours in training line personnel, including **OSHA compliance** across Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware.

"Safety has simply been the
unwavering foundation of
my entire career."

—Matt Shaw

"Safety has simply been the unwavering foundation of my entire career. Teaching younger employees and line apprentices to safely complete a job is what first drew me to a career focused on safety. Mecklenburg Electric has a premier safety program, and I am excited to put these new skills and principles to work for us all to reach even higher levels of safety in our daily construction and maintenance practices," Matt said.

Prior to coming to MEC, he was an instructor of safety and training at the **Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives**. Since relocating to the area, Matt and his wife, **Norma Jean**, reside in the **Drakes Branch** area of **Charlotte County**.

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

WHAT
DO
YOU
THiNK?

We've redesigned our CONNECTIONS newsletter with the intention and hope of making its appearance more contemporary and making it a bit easier to read as well.

Please let us know what you think of the new design by emailing Steve Johnson at sjohnson@vmdaec.com or Jim Robertson at jrobertson@vmdaec.com.

And if you have any story ideas, please forward those to us as well!



Association
of Electric
Cooperatives

Virginia, Maryland & Delaware

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CO-OP FIRSTS

NEW Motorcycle ‘Keeping the Lights On’ Plates Available

“Keeping the Lights On” license plates have been a big success, with over 850 Virginia plates on the road already. As a reminder, the VMDAEC Education Scholarship Foundation will benefit from the sale and renewal of these specialized plates once we reach 1,000. We are projecting a recurring revenue stream starting in 2020 that will go directly towards college and lineworker school scholarships for cooperative member students. They are now available for motorcycles, so go to dmv.virginia.gov and order your specialized plate today!



SOCIAL MEDIA

Say Cheese!

Cooperative Living asked for photos of readers’ pets dressed up in some way for a SAY CHEESE reader-photo column. The magazine received some great images like this one of Hairy Pugger. Photos will be featured in the May magazine. Read it online at co-opliving.com.



Hidden Gems

Cooperative Living readers have a chance to win a weekend getaway for two to St. Michaels, MD. All you need to do is share a favorite B&B, scenic vista or an out-of-the-way vacation spot in Virginia, Delaware or the Maryland Eastern Shore for the May issue of the magazine. [Click here](#) to fill out the form or find it at co-opliving.com. Be sure to give us a brief description of what makes your hidden gem so special. Hurry; nominations are due by March 10.



A Trip to the Zoo!

Cooperative Living magazine’s 18th annual Youth Art Contest is now underway and all youthful artists are invited to showcase their best work. The theme for this year’s contest is “A Trip to the Zoo!”

Go to co-opliving.com/contests/youth-art for all the details!

The deadline for entries is Monday, May 4.



Save some paper.

Have your copy of CONNECTIONS emailed to you.

Contact Phyllis Long at PLong@VMDAEC.com to be placed on our email list.

Association of Electric Cooperatives
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Check out the March-April edition online now!



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