



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-OPS RESPOND TO NEED WITH FREE WIFI & HOT SPOTS

Internet Accessibility through Wireless Hotspots

BARC Connects Deploys 4 Wireless Hot Spots across Rockbridge County to Assist Students During Pandemic

BARC recognizes that many students in the community do not have access to high-speed internet at home, and with Virginia schools now closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year, many students need online access to complete coursework. To help all local students, BARC Connects has deployed free wireless hot spots throughout Rockbridge County to help provide this access to students in these unprecedented times.

This week, BARC Connects opened up wireless hot spots at four different Rockbridge County Public School parking lots: Mountain View Elementary, Fairfield Elementary, Natural Bridge Elementary, and Rockbridge County High School. BARC's intent is to offer internet access at convenient points across the county. Students and parents can practice social distancing by accessing the internet in the safety of their own vehicle in the parking lot of any of these schools.

"We have made accessing the wireless service simple. When a user first connects their device, the user will see a splash screen with our logo and the name "BARC-PUBLIC-WiFi."

Once the user accepts the terms and conditions of service, it is ready to go," said Gary Sickler, BARC Connects network operations manager. "There is no password necessary."

BARC staff, in coordination with the Rockbridge Area Network Authority (RANA), and RCPS worked together in identifying locations for access points. All partners expect users of this public WiFi to adhere to state guidelines and practice social distancing and not congregate.

"Our free hot spots are open to all students and parents in the region. We chose to partner with RANA and RCPS in order to cover a larger geographic area, and selected schools based on parking lot size and WiFi coverage," said Mike Keyser, BARC CEO.

-Report by Tish Blackwell, Communications Specialist, BARC Electric Cooperative.



Community Electric Offers Free Wi-Fi during COVID-19 Crisis



Community Electric Cooperative has announced free Wi-Fi available for members and the surrounding community, effective immediately. Although this is the only offered location at this time, the co-op hopes to explore opportunities with other local businesses throughout the surrounding areas to identify additional reliable access points for its community.

"With so many people working and learning from home, we want our members and community to have access to the internet during the COVID-19 pandemic," says Steven Harmon, CEO and president of CEC and RECORE. "We are all in a time of need and this is just one of the ways CEC can step in and help and we encourage other businesses in our area to do the same during this pandemic."

The hot spot can be accessed by simply parking in the office parking lot at 52 W. Windsor Blvd. in Windsor, Va., and logging on to your device and search for Wi-Fi connections. CEC's hot spot is labeled Community Electric WiFi and does not require a password. This service is offered on a first-come, first-served basis and the co-op requests that people only park in designated parking spaces.

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

Youth Tour Canceled amid Health Concerns



Thousands of youths have converged on Washington, D.C., every summer since 1958 for the annual Electric Cooperative Youth Tour, which brings together high school students from across the country for an immersive experience in our nation's capital.

Unfortunately, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has caused organizers to cancel the 2020 event, which was scheduled for June 19-25. Jim Matheson, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, which oversees the tour, said the decision was "based on the health risks and local, state and national orders."

The cancellation should not diminish the achievement of the more than 50 youths from VMD Association co-ops who were tapped for the prestigious honor, as well as the many volunteer chaperones. They represent the best of their co-ops and we appreciate their commitment to Youth Tour.

-Report by Steven Johnson, Editor, Cooperative Living.

CO-OP NEWS

Jim Guy Joins Mecklenburg Electric as General Counsel

Jim Guy has joined Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative as general counsel and will serve as both the board's attorney and in-house counsel for MEC, EMPOWER Broadband, and EMPOWER Telecom. In his new role, Jim will be responsible for all legal and regulatory matters and serve as parliamentarian to the board of directors.

"After thirty years working in law firms, I'm thrilled to join an industry-leading cooperative in-house. MEC's innovative rural broadband enterprise is driving accelerated economic viability in Southside Virginia, and I'm proud to be part of this fantastic team," Jim said.

"I have worked with Jim on a variety of cooperative legal matters over the past 28 years," says MEC President and CEO John C. Lee Jr. "He has provided sound and beneficial legal counsel and representation to electric cooperatives, including MEC, for almost every imaginable legal matter including rate cases, contract litigation, easement disputes, etc. and joins us after a stint at Williams Mullen, one of the state's largest and strongest law firms."

Jim has represented electric cooperatives for 30 years in regulatory, transactional, corporate and policy matters. He served as the 128th president of the Virginia Bar Association in 2016. He earned his undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Virginia, where he was an Echols Scholar. He is a longtime member of the Electric Cooperative Bar Association and was a founding convener of the Transatlantic Energy Conference in Washington, D.C. (2014, 2016 and 2019); Brussels, Belgium (2015); and Berlin, Germany (2017). He is married to Judith Guy, a talented painter, and they have three grown children who live in Los Angeles, Boston and Richmond.



"MEC's innovative rural broadband enterprise is driving accelerated economic viability in Southside Virginia, and I'm proud to be part of this fantastic team."

—Jim Guy

"Clearly, when legal counsel has a seat on a cooperative's senior management team, it's a strong indicator to the cooperative's stakeholders (both internal and external) that ethics, compliance and other legal risk considerations are a top priority for our organization," John notes.

"Additionally, in-house counsel's inclusion on that team impacts corporate culture by sending a powerful message that strategic decisions addressed by the board, and business decisions considered by the CEO, management and staff, are made with the appropriate consideration of the ethical, legal and reputational impacts.

"Hiring a competent attorney to serve as in-house counsel will protect our interests, reduce our risk, strengthen and enhance our internal capabilities, ensure we are ethical, compliant and operating in accordance with all laws, ensure we are receiving professional and timely legal counsel and guidance on fiduciary duties and matters critical to our cooperative, and provide an effective parliamentarian for MEC and EMPOWER membership and board of directors meetings," John concludes.

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

NISC SAYS THANK YOU

Click below to watch video or visit <https://youtu.be/7Lz-c8RAs90>.



ONLINE TRAINING

Perfect Time to ‘Sharpen the Saw’

With many of us working remotely at home, now is the perfect time to polish current skills and/or learn new skills to become even more valuable to our colleagues and members. For the past several years, employees of Touchstone Energy® member co-ops have been able to complete online training via Lynda.com®, now known as LinkedIn Learning. More than 13,000 online tutorials, led by experts, are available at no cost.

Working from home can be an adjustment. Search the phrase “working remotely” to find tutorials such as:

- Working Remotely
- Time Management: Working from Home
- Productivity Tips: Finding Your Productive Mindset

Other topics of interest may include:

- Microsoft Office
- Project management
- NRECA & Touchstone Energy courses
- Teamwork
- Web design
- Grammar
- Communication
- Tips for supervisors and managers.



For more information about LinkedIn Learning or how to access the online training, contact your human resources representative or Brandon Burton at bburton@vmdaec.com.

–Report by Jim Robertson, Creatives Services Specialist, VMDAEC and Brandon Burton, Director of Continuing Education, VMDAEC.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Distractions through Positivity

Social media is proving its worth during this time when people are forced to be at home, with many isolated from family and friends. *Cooperative Living* magazine readership and online fan engagement are on the rise as a result. Nearly 2,000 contest submissions were received this month, excluding those sent by mail.

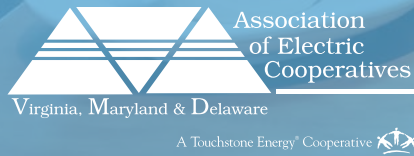
If you follow *Cooperative Living* on Facebook and/or Instagram, you’ve likely noticed the increased use of videos. These positive messages provide hope and a short escape from feelings of captivity and isolation. One thing is for sure; life will be different when this passes. We’re thankful for the opportunity to brighten our fans’ days in the meantime.

[Click below to watch these videos, and more, on the *Cooperative Living* Facebook page and YouTube channel.](#)



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