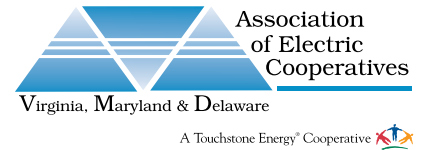


A regular update for leaders, members and friends of
the VA-MD-DE Association of Electric Cooperatives

from Richard G. Johnstone Jr. | President & CEO



CO-OP NEWS

Northern Neck Announces CEO Transition

Northern Neck Electric Cooperative has announced that the Board of Directors has selected Brad Hicks as its next Chief Executive Officer, effective June 19, 2020. Brad will succeed Greg White, who will be retiring after 15 years of dedicated and loyal service with the Cooperative.

The Board of Directors, staff and members of NNEC applaud the leadership and service that Greg has provided for the past 15 years. "Greg's expertise in the electric industry has been sought throughout Virginia and the nation. We have been fortunate to have had his leadership at the helm, guiding us tirelessly throughout the years. We all thank Greg and his wife Carolyn for their service and wish them many years of happy, well-deserved retirement," said NNEC Chairman of the Board Hunter Greenlaw.

Brad has over 25 years of leadership experience in the electric utility industry and a broad knowledge of the cooperative business model. He has served in various executive roles at electric cooperatives in Georgia, Texas and South Carolina, and as a principal engineer at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Brad was selected after a nation-wide search led by Chris Guiney of CarterBaldwin Executive Search on behalf of the Board of Directors. "We believe that Brad exhibits the leadership skills going forward that will keep NNEC in the forefront of the electric utility business. We look forward to having Brad and his family join us at NNEC and immersing himself in the wonderful and blessed area of the Northern Neck. As Brad travels throughout the Northern Neck service territory, we know he will build lasting relationships with our members that will serve as the foundation for the future growth of the Cooperative," said Chairman Greenlaw.

Brad stated, "I am honored to be named CEO of Northern Neck Electric Cooperative and look forward to working with the board of directors, the employees and the members we



Brad Hicks (above) will succeed Greg White as NNEC CEO on June 19.

serve. Executing the strategic vision of the board of directors through an innovative approach takes vision and strong leadership and I am truly humbled with this opportunity to represent Northern Neck in that journey."

Brad was most recently President & CEO of Habersham EMC in Clarkesville, Ga. He has also served on the Sensory Advisory Board at Akron University and is an active member of the NRECA Transmission & Distribution Strategies Membership Advisory Group. He is a licensed professional engineer and holds a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from Tennessee Technological University and a Master of Business Administration from Aspen University.

—Report by Jay Garner, Public Relations Manager,
Northern Neck Electric Cooperative.

Choptank Moves Annual Meeting to August


Choptank Electric Cooperative will adjourn its annual meeting from April 30 until August 13, according to President and CEO Mike Malandro and the co-op's board of directors.

The move was made to comply with Gov. Larry Hogan's orders and Centers for Disease Control guidance in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Those factors would have made it impossible to achieve a quorum at the planned April 30 meeting.

Choptank officials said if subsequent guidance or administrative orders from federal or state authorities preclude the meeting from going forward in August, it will be adjourned until the next available time when such a meeting can be conducted.



Choptank Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

The Choptank Board of Directors wants members to know that their safety is its primary concern and thanks them for their patience in this difficult time.

—Report by Beth Hallett, Manager of Marketing and Communications,
Choptank Electric Cooperative.

CO-OP BROADBAND

EMPOWER Finalizes Acquisition of BIT System

Officials with EMPOWER Broadband and EMPOWER Telecom Inc., have announced the acquisition of Buggs Island Telephone Cooperative’s system and its resources.

After two years of deliberation between the two entities and approval from the Virginia State Corporation Commission and the Federal Communications Commission, the acquisition became official with the final closing on March 31.

The efforts and resources of BIT will be combined with those of EMPOWER, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative, to supply essential communications services of high-speed internet and telephone to those living in Southside Virginia and northern North Carolina.

According to BIT’s bylaws, approval by at least two-thirds of the membership was required for the acquisition to proceed and BIT members were called upon to provide their consent. The proposal passed overwhelmingly.

Former BIT Board of Directors chairwoman Linsey Carroll stated, “To meet the growing communications needs of today’s families and businesses, BIT was faced with the massive and costly undertaking of replacing the aging existing copper telephone network with a fiber-to-the-premise system.”

She added, “Accordingly, our board strongly supported EMPOWER’s acquisition of BIT’s employees and resources, a recommendation that was soundly re-affirmed by a vote of BIT’s membership. The former BIT Directors are all very proud and honored to have served the BIT membership and we look forward to watching EMPOWER thrive and work aggressively to bridge the digital divide that is so apparent in times like these.”

Former BIT General Manager Michele Taylor said, “Both BIT and EMPOWER were building fiber-to-the-home for internet and phone service into the same areas. Since both of our organizations had the common mission of bringing enhanced communication service to our members and our region, discussions arose on how combining our forces would allow us to do the job more efficiently and effectively. BIT’s team of employees is excited to join with EMPOWER and expand our collective effort



From left, EMPOWER Broadband’s Chairman of the Board of Directors David Jones and President of the BIT Board of Directors Linsey Carroll sign the agreement to commence the merger of the two communications organizations. The acquisition of BIT by EMPOWER became official on March 31 upon the closing and approval of the State Corporation Commission and the Federal Communications Commission.

in delivering much needed services to Mecklenburg and Brunswick counties and across Southside Virginia.”

David Jones, chairperson of the EMPOWER Broadband board of directors commented, “This acquisition and merger of resources will greatly enhance the very expensive, time-consuming buildout of fiber throughout our communities and will bring to fruition our mission of providing excellent service to current subscribers, and continuously deploying fiber so that we can offer this critically important resource to additional homes and businesses.”

EMPOWER Broadband President and CEO John C. Lee, Jr. added, “Today, high-speed broadband is not only needed but it is simply required to study, to work, and to enjoy numerous simple joys of modern life that are a standard in much of the world. Our newly combined team is working to integrate operations and, wherever possible, we’re taking advantage of opportunities to improve service, increase efficiency, decrease costs and continue our aggressive, but disciplined rollout of the best in broadband technology.”

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

TRAINING CENTER ENHANCEMENTS

Fencing Installed at VMDAEC Training Center Practice Substation

The newly installed fence is an important requirement of the National Electric Safety Code (NESC) and was built to code requirements regarding height, grounding and the materials used to construct the fence. For electric cooperatives the substation fence is also a requirement of RUS.

“The substation fence is another useful tool for our training program as we cover it extensively in our training module,” says Substation Training Apprentice Program (STAP) Instructor Bob Wilcox.

Substation fences protect the enclosed equipment from the public and from most animals. By limiting access to the substation, electric utilities maintain tighter control over their electric system, improve reliability, and maintain safety for the public and their own employees.



Fencing was recently installed around the practice substation that adjoins the Association’s Training Center in Palmyra.

VMDAEC is creating a complete practice substation to provide a better level of hands-on training and a location where students can actually see what is discussed in the classroom. The objective is to have a fully simulated substation where students can learn to perform proper switching procedures, transfer load, write switching orders or procedures, install and remove substation equipment, test substation equipment and controls, and get familiar with anything within the fence.

–Report by Jim Robertson, Creative Services Specialist, VMDAEC.

CO-OP BROADBAND

Northern Neck Electric Cooperative Part of Regional Broadband Initiative

All Points Broadband, Dominion Energy, Northern Neck Electric Cooperative and the counties of King George, Northumberland, Richmond and Westmoreland have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding to advance a regional broadband partnership that aims to deliver fiber-optic broadband service to unserved households and businesses in Virginia’s Northern Neck Region.

“Connecting unserved communities to broadband makes online learning, telehealth, and telework more accessible, which is particularly necessary as the COVID-19 pandemic forces us to rely on virtual services,” said Gov. Ralph Northam. “I’m encouraged to see a regional initiative with so many partners coming together to make sure more Virginians can get the services they need from home.”

Under the agreement, All Points, Dominion Energy, Northern Neck Electric Cooperative and each participating county will work toward a phased approach that will result in a petition to the State Corporation Commission to seek regulatory approval later in 2020.

“We are excited to work with Dominion Energy and All Points to help expand broadband to unserved members and improve our electric grid,” said Greg White, President and CEO of Northern Neck Electric Cooperative. “Bridging the digital divide is a complex challenge and we have to think big—that’s why our cooperative is joining a regional partnership that involves two electric utilities, an Internet service provider, and at least four counties.”

“With our roots in public service, Dominion Energy is driven to contribute to the quality of life and economic prosperity in the communities we serve,” said Ed Baine, senior vice president of power delivery for Dominion Energy. “This partnership on the Northern Neck is the most ambitious and comprehensive initiative to date to expand broadband access to unserved Virginians, and the coronavirus outbreak



has proven that this is more important than ever. We are excited to partner with Northern Neck Electric Cooperative, All Points Broadband and each participating county to help support the expansion of this critical service.”

Under a pilot program authorized by 2019 legislation patroned by Del. Israel O’Quinn and supported by Sen. Ryan McDougle, Sen. Richard H. Stuart and Del. Margaret Ransone, the middle-mile fiber that Dominion is deploying on the Northern Neck will be leveraged by All Points Broadband to connect currently unserved homes and businesses.

The fiber infrastructure will also provide the capacity to improve utility efficiency and reliability for customers across the four-county region.

“We applaud the efforts by All Points Broadband, Dominion Energy and Northern Neck Electric Cooperative on this initiative to bring needed broadband access to the Northern Neck,” legislators McDougle, Stuart and Ransone said in a statement. “This initiative will allow homes, businesses and educational institutions to function in today’s ‘digital Commonwealth.’ We are thrilled to see the next steps of this crucial project begin.”

The boards of supervisors of King George, Northumberland, Richmond and Westmoreland Counties have voted unanimously to join this regional initiative, which was facilitated in partnership by the Northern Neck Planning District Commission.

–Report by Jay Garner, Public Relations Manager, Northern Neck Electric Cooperative.

CONGRATULATIONS

Cooperative Living Honored

The staff of Cooperative Living has been recognized with several awards in the annual Hermes Creative Awards, which is one of the oldest and largest competitions in the world with about 6,000 entries a year. It is conducted by the Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals.

Laura Emery, Gold Award, Print Media/Writing/Publication Article for “Aiming High” which told the story of Virginia’s first female electric cooperative lineworker. January 2020 issue of Cooperative Living.

Steven Johnson, Platinum Award, Print Media/Writing/Publication Article for “On the Outside, Looking In,” which told the stories of students locked out when Prince Edward County closed its schools rather than integrate. February 2020 issue of Cooperative Living.

Cooperative Living Design Team, Honorable Mention, Print Media/Design/Publication Interior. January 2020 issue of Cooperative Living.



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

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Broadband Access Barriers Removed

On Good Friday, April 10, Governor Ralph Northam signed HB831 and SB794 – without amendments – into law. These were two identical bills that will remove barriers to broadband access in rural Virginia. In effect, these bills create a framework to open utility easements to broadband infrastructure.

During the 2020 General Assembly session, the Association assembled a broad coalition of supporters to advocate for the legislation, including Dominion Energy, The Sierra Club, The Farm Bureau, Americans for Prosperity, and The Virginia Agribusiness Council. Your Government Affairs Department worked closely with Governor Northam’s Chief Broadband Advisor, Evan Feinman, to craft legislation that eventually became one of Governor Northam’s signature bills.

The bills faced early opposition from the Virginia Family Foundation and the law firm of Waldo and Lyle. Late opposition came from the Virginia Municipal League (VML) and the Virginia Association of Counties, driven by large localities like the City of

Norfolk and Henrico County. The bills passed resoundingly; 91-6 in the House and 37-2 in the Senate. In a post-session letter to Governor Northam, VML made a final attempt to scuttle the bill, asking Governor Northam to delay enactment of these bills by one year – citing the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these late efforts rang hollow, only coming from localities that had abundant broadband coverage. Localities were apparently divided on this request by VML, as several rural localities sent letters in support of the legislation, asking that it be signed immediately.

NOVEC-territory legislator, Delegate Jennifer Carroll Foy, and A&N-territory legislator Senator Lynwood Lewis patroned the bills in the House and Senate, respectively. Senators Bill Stanley and Mark Peake had similar bills that were “rolled into” the Senate bill.

There may be a formal signing ceremony, but that would be much later in the year once the State of Emergency is lifted.

–Report by Andrew Vehorn, Vice President of Governmental Affairs, VMDAEC.

CO-OP TO THE RESCUE

BARC Electric Featured in People Magazine for Helping Rescue Stranded Bear Cubs

Three orphaned black bear cubs were stranded more than 50 feet up in a tree on Easter Sunday after their mother was struck and killed by a truck on I-64 in Rockbridge County. When BARC Electric was contacted by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the co-op quickly responded by sending a bucket truck to the scene. The three female cubs, each weighing about 6 lbs., were brought down safely and are doing well. The story gained the attention of People magazine and received lots of attention on social media as well. [Click here](#) to read the full story. Thank you to our friends at BARC Electric Cooperative and everyone else who contributed to this rescue effort.



–Report by Jim Robertson, Creative Services Specialist, VMDAEC.

Link to story: <https://people.com/pets/bear-cubs-rescued-by-police-mom-struck-killed-by-truck-virginia/>



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