



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

from Richard G. Johnstone Jr. | President & CEO



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

## PANDEMIC RESPONSE

### Co-ops Power On Through Adversity

While COVID-19 may be receiving the majority of the attention this year, 2020 could easily be named the Year of the Cooperative. For several decades, the nation's electric co-ops have been faced with and overcome adversity. Our co-ops in Virginia, Maryland and Delaware have met many challenges related to severe weather over the years. The typical crisis usually includes rain, snow, wind or ice and widespread power outages. The culprit this year was an unprecedented pandemic causing financial and emotional hardship on co-op members and employees. The co-ops were prepared.

Lobbies are closed to the public, and many co-op employees are working remotely from home. Conveniences implemented by several co-ops, such as online account management and payment kiosks, have proven their worth. Crews in the field have adapted well to new social distancing requirements, while virtual meetings have replaced the conference rooms. "The work that was done by our IT department to get our member services representatives and other office employees who didn't have adequate internet access at home the ability to work remotely will benefit the cooperative well beyond this pandemic," says Melissa Gay, communications and member services manager for Central Virginia Electric Cooperative.

Many of CVEC's employees may work remotely through August. The co-op is also currently researching ways to host a virtual Member Advisory Council meeting and continues to add internet hot spots throughout its service area to better serve members.

Rappahannock Electric Cooperative revised its disaster recovery plan several years ago to include a pandemic response. REC Director of Communications and Public Relations Casey Hollins says, "Each year, we practice a disaster simulation so that ability to activate the plans remains fresh in everyone's mind and so we can make adjustments as needed." REC formed a pandemic response team that meets frequently, provides regular updates and collectively anticipates upcoming needs. "Having that dedicated team of leaders focused on the pandemic really allowed us to achieve some of the success we were able to experience amid the frequently changing conditions," adds Casey.

Other co-ops, like NOVEC, are also making modifications to their crisis communication plans. "We've added talking points for COVID-19-related topics and have prewritten some communication materials dealing with employee-related testing scenarios," says Lisa Hooker, vice president of public relations. NOVEC's internal theme of "In This Together" is consistent with the family atmosphere within an electric co-op. The co-op's ramped-up digital communication with employees has included topics like grocery shopping, housecleaning, mindfulness and meditation, cooking, and online learning. Lisa says the campaign is light-hearted and intended to encourage and uplift employees. NOVEC is utilizing its intranet and digital signage in employee kitchens.

Employees and members alike have positively responded to the changes implemented at our distribution co-ops. However, plenty of

additional challenges lie ahead. One involves collections issues after the disconnection moratorium is lifted. CVEC formed a committee responsible for exploring options for resuming collections this summer. An extensive communications plan will be created to ensure members with accumulated arrears fully understand what to expect as their co-op transitions back to normal operations.



A&N Electric Cooperative's service area has been one of the most hard-hit in Virginia because of issues at poultry facilities. Accomack County has the highest per capita COVID-19 case rate in Virginia.

Recognizing the unique challenges for its employees and members, ANEC has implemented its plan to follow Centers for Disease Control guidelines on protecting its employees and their family members while being able to respond quickly in cases of power outages.

"We are very fortunate that our employees and their families have had little to no issues as it relates to the COVID-19 outbreak here on the shore. Our response by all of our A&N employees has been the best yet, and they did not miss a beat as we continued to provide normal essential services. Our outage response center remains open 24/7 for reporting, and crews are on standby, ready to respond if or when the need occurs," says Butch Williamson, president and CEO.

Southside Electric Cooperative has enhanced its focus on community. "In adherence to SEC's mission to enhance the quality of life of the communities served, the cooperative has focused on community contributions in order that area citizens receive much-needed support," says SEC Director of Community Relations Lloyd Lenhart.

SEC has contributed to area schools to help fund meal programs and the purchasing of books, donated to various food banks and



SEC Communications Specialist Jennifer Wall drops off hand sanitizer for the Prince Edward County Sheriff's Department.

distributed more than 1,000 vials of hand sanitizer to area Sheriff's departments. Co-op employees have shown their support and encouragement for graduating high school seniors and contributed to community needs by sewing face masks, giving blood, donating hygiene items and developing a grocery delivery service for the elderly and others in need.

(Continued on page 2)

## Co-ops Power On, continued from page 1

Delaware Electric Cooperative has taken a variety of steps to deal with the pandemic and continues to monitor the situation, President and CEO Bill Andrew said. COVID-19 has been a problem in DEC's territory, with Kent and Sussex counties accounting for more than 5,000 confirmed cases and more than 160 deaths.

"Public safety is our top priority during this time," Andrew said. "We've implemented appropriate steps and will do what we need to do to protect the health and safety of our employees and the communities we serve."

DEC has further limited employee travel and vendor visits to its headquarters building. All employee and public events have been canceled for the foreseeable future. Many employees are working from home and the building is being frequently disinfected.

NOVEC reports increases in page views related to energy assistance and Operation Round Up on its website. Like other co-ops, NOVEC has experienced positive interaction with members across its social media channels. In fact, their video about a donation to the local food bank exceeded 100,000 views.

REC's Casey Hollins adds, "Our members seem to be very impressed by, and appreciative of, our efforts to keep our workforce safe, while still maintaining the same quality service we have always aimed to provide." REC has also been rewarded with positivity from its employees, who have displayed dedication to continue serving members and flexibility to adapt to new challenges.

Safety remains at the forefront for employees at REC and all Virginia, Maryland and Delaware electric co-ops. All are entering this next phase of reopening with caution and concern for community and their respective workforces. Some are considering modified shifts and rearranged workspaces. Productivity and service have remained high at all VMD co-ops, which has led to a conservative approach moving forward. CVEC, for example, has created "sanitation stations" in each office and crew rooms with large containers of hand sanitizer to refill personal bottles, disinfectant spray, facemasks and gloves.

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

## PERSONALS – NEWS ABOUT MEMBERS OF THE VMD COOPERATIVE FAMILY

### In Memoriam: Wayne Browning

The co-op community was saddened by the passing of R. Wayne Browning, a longtime board member at A&N Electric Cooperative and former board chairman of the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives.



Wayne, a Davis Wharf resident, died May 27 at his home at the age of 88. He had been an integral part of the ANEC board since his first election in October 1981.

"Wayne will be sorely missed but there is no doubt his contributions to A&N Electric Cooperative will stand the test of time. His steady hand has helped ANEC become a better cooperative and he put the cooperative principle of concern for community into practice every day," said Butch Williamson, president and CEO of ANEC.

"Wayne was a towering figure in the electric cooperative movement and a force for good in improving the lives not only of residents of the Eastern Shore, but of cooperative members throughout the mid-Atlantic region," said Richard G. Johnstone Jr., president and CEO of the VMD Association.

Wayne was born Sept. 13, 1931 in Plymouth, N.C., the middle child in a family of five, and grew up for several years without the benefit of electricity. "I was eight years old; it happened in the '40s," he told *Cooperative Living* in a 2004 interview.

He attended Chowan College in North Carolina, where he was a football and baseball standout.

"Chowan taught Wayne the three R's," said A. Jackson Mason, who inducted Wayne into the Chowan Hall of Fame in 1989, "reading, writing and the road to Richmond." At the time, Chowan was a two-year college, so Wayne then moved on to the University of Richmond, where he was also a top football player for the Spiders.

Professionally, Wayne owned and operated Copes Ice and Coal for many years and provided numerous high school and

college students with summer jobs through the years. He and his wife Mary Will have welcomed guests at Bay View Waterfront Bed and Breakfast, and lived there since 1961.

In the co-op world, Wayne served for more than 19 years as secretary-treasurer of ANEC, as well as serving on many other co-op committees. He was chairman of the VMD Association board from 2010 to 2012 and served with distinction for many years on the VMD Communications & Public Relations Committee, which he chaired for several years.

Among his civic accomplishments, Wayne was a member of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission and a past president of Eastern Shore Vocational Center. He also served with Shore Memorial Hospital, Eastern Shore Jaycees, Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce, Eastern Shore Yacht & Country Club and the Virginia Ice Association.

He was one of the original organizers of the Eastern Shore Seafood Festival in 1969 and remained actively involved for many years. Wayne was a 50-year Mason. He was raised at Ocean Lodge and was a member of Central Lodge #300 A.F. & A.M. at the time of his death.

Near and dear to his heart was Craddockville United Methodist Church, where he was treasurer, Sunday School superintendent, president of the United Methodist Men, lay leader and chairman of the Administrative Board. "I could not be happier. A positive attitude will take you a long way," he told *Cooperative Living*.

Wayne is survived by his wife, five children and four grandchildren. The service will be private. Memorial tributes can be shared with the family at [williamsfuneralhomes.com](http://williamsfuneralhomes.com).

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to Chowan College Braves/Hawks Club, One University Place, Murfreesboro, NC 27855 or online at [chowan.edu/payments](http://chowan.edu/payments). Scroll to charitable gifts and follow the prompts; University of Richmond Spider Club, 114 UR Drive, U of R, VA 23173 or online at [uronline.net/givenow](http://uronline.net/givenow). Drop down box to Spider Club. He was always gratefully aware that they paid for his education.

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

## CO-OP LOWERS RATES

### DEC Board Approves Rate Decrease

Delaware Electric Cooperative's Board of Directors approved a rate decrease on May 20 for all 103,000 DEC members. On June 1, rates for those served by Delaware Electric Cooperative will fall by four percent, a reduction that will save DEC's membership \$7 million per year.

The rate decrease will save the average family using 1,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity \$5 per month, or \$60 per year. While the co-op's rates have been adjusted periodically over the last decade, they remain among the lowest in the region. Co-op members save hundreds of dollars per year in energy costs, compared with the average rates charged by Delaware's other electric utilities.

According to President and CEO Bill Andrew, "Falling wholesale power costs and our nationally-recognized Beat the Peak program allowed us to lower energy costs for our members. Beat the Peak has saved members more than \$32 million since 2008.



DELAWARE ELECTRIC CO-OP

"Our 155 employees work extremely hard to provide members with affordable and reliable power. We are proud to offer Delawareans some of the lowest electric rates on Delmarva."

When the rate decrease takes effect on June 1, co-op members will be paying the same price for power they did in 2008. While the rate change was planned before the COVID-19 crisis struck, DEC officials hope lower energy costs will help those struggling financially during the pandemic.

— Report by Jeremy Tucker, Manager of Marketing and Communications, Delaware Electric Cooperative.

## COPING WITH COVID

### VMD to Resume More-Normal Operations on June 15

The VMD office in Innsbrook and the Training Center in Palmyra will both reopen on June 15 to more-normal operations. The VMD staff has been working remotely since March 16, continuing to deliver every service possible to our 15 member systems during this time.

When almost all scheduled training classes and conferences had to be cancelled because of the pandemic, VMD employees switched their focus to developing creative ways to offer training. VMD meeting planners created a series of four webinars that were well-received by member systems, while our safety trainers developed original videos highlighting a variety of relevant lineworker and general safety topics.

Legislative and regulatory work has gone on as always, and in many ways has expanded, as the Association has worked to keep member systems updated on the various ways that federal and state agencies have responded to the pandemic, and informed about how these actions will affect our members.

The magazine staff has continued its work unabated and has done a good job publishing an array of strong issues of *Cooperative Living*, as well as a series of engaging videos on a variety of cooperative-specific and general-interest topics. As covered previously in *Connections*, two major casualties of the pandemic were the annual Engineers & Operations Conference, as well as the Association's single largest event each year, the Gaff-n-Go Lineworker's Rodeo. But planning is already underway to make both events even bigger and better next year.

Planning is also well underway for the VMD Association's 2020 Annual Meeting, which will now be held as a virtual event. With an outstanding lineup of speakers, videos and presentations, we're hoping to draw our largest attendance ever, since attendees can enjoy the meeting from the comfort of their easy chair at home, or their desk chair at the office. NRECA President Curtis Wynn will provide the keynote address; a powerhouse speaker-to-be-determined will discuss what the post-pandemic world will look like; we will announce VMD leadership award winners; and the 17 young men who



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

ventured to Bolivia last fall to electrify several remote villages will be honored.

Be on the lookout for registration information next month; you won't want to miss this first-of-a-kind annual meeting for your Association!

Also, on the director training front, plans are in place for the two training classes that were cancelled in March to be offered in October, at a favorite venue for our member system leaders, the Virginia Crossings Resort outside Richmond.

With the reopening of the VMD Training Center in Palmyra, member system lineworkers will be able to continue their journey toward completing the eight-step, four-year Lineworker Training Apprentice Program, or LTAP. With three classrooms available, the Association will be able to offer training that accommodates the recommended social distancing, with face masks utilized in common areas.

At the Association's Innsbrook office, VMD staff will also practice social distancing and use face masks in common areas, while continuing to meet member system needs in governmental affairs, communications, continuing education, and safety services.

All of us at the VMD Association look forward to the time, we hope in the not-too-distant future, when we can again gather frequently in person for meetings, conferences, and other events! If you have any questions or requests for us, please be sure to contact Richard at 804-363-2938, or Brian at 804-356-5688.

## PGEC Moves Ahead with Ruralband

Prince George Electric Cooperative and Prince George County have come together again with the common goal of connecting the community through high-speed, fiber-to-the-home internet access.

Funding for Phase II of the broadband expansion will go toward the construction, equipment, operation and installation of 500 new connection points, making broadband access available to potential subscribers within 1,000 feet of a VDOT road.

With the county's support, PGEC can expand broadband access to additional Prince George County residents at an accelerated pace.

"From educational opportunities to expanding workforce development initiatives, better access to better internet has never been more important. Our goal is to ultimately make access to fiber internet an option to everyone in Prince George County, and with the county's continued support – this will be possible," stated Casey Logan, Prince George Electric Cooperative president and CEO.

PGEC Enterprises, LLC, doing business as Ruralband, offers a



secure, reliable, competitive, and sustainable infrastructure that is essential in meeting Prince George County's future broadband needs. Ruralband offers internet speeds of up to 1 Gig (1,000 Mbps), making it the best option for home-based businesses, online learning opportunities, accessing telemedicine resources, and more.

"The power of partnership is clear and is demonstrated by the successful partnership that began with the first broadband project with Prince George County. PGEC is grateful for Prince George County's support in our FTTH initiative," stated Paul Brown, Prince George Electric Cooperative chairman of the board.

Percy C. Ashcraft, Prince George County Administrator, stated, "We are pleased to enter into a second round of funding with this public/private partnership to help capitalize an expedited process during the COVID-19 pandemic. Broadband has become a required utility and, during these times of self-isolation, remains a vital link for work, school, family and even shopping. As Phase II targets the communities of Burrowsville and Carson, we hope our solution continues expansion and serves as a model for other communities."

## Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative Warns of Scams

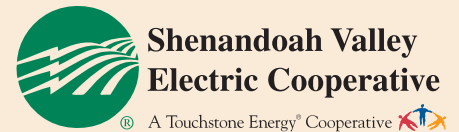
Scams are becoming increasingly prevalent during the pandemic, and Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative is advising members to be aware of scam calls in which callers are demanding payment immediately or else threatening that power will be shut off.

The cooperative is reminding members that SVEC employees will never call members and demand immediate payment by phone. In one recent example of a reported scam, the caller tried to pressure a member into paying money because the member supposedly had an old meter installed.

Another indication that a call might be from scammers is that they ask for a certain type of payment — perhaps insisting you provide them with one or more debit cards.

"First and foremost, we want our members to know that no representative of the cooperative will ever mention a

specific credit card or payment method, and our employees will only communicate about potential termination of electric service with members through a mailed notification, not through a phone call asking the member to pay for their service by credit card," said J. Michael Aulgur, SVEC Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer.



"Unfortunately, during this pandemic virus when people are already feeling additional stress on their daily lives, scammers are trying to take advantage of others. We want our members to be aware that correspondence of this nature will not be generated by the cooperative."

— Report by Preston Knight, Public Relations Representative, Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative.



P.O. Box 2340  
Glen Allen, VA 23058-2340