

Sen. Warner Discusses Broadband With Electric Cooperative Leaders



Meeting with community and electric cooperative leaders April 7 in Lexington, Va., and April 8 in Charlottesville, Sen. Mark Warner spoke forcefully about the need for greater access to high-speed internet service in rural America.

BARC ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

"We've got to make sure that we actually get broadband expansion at higher speeds, that we're not simply overbuilding areas that are already overbuilt or providing a quality of service that doesn't meet the needs of the people," Warner said during a roundtable hosted by BARC Electric Cooperative.

"There's no reason why the kids in Bath County shouldn't have every bit the high-speed internet connectivity as the kids in Alexandria," he said. "This needs to be an economic justice issue."

The forum, held at BARC's solar facility just west of Lexington, brought the senator together with about two dozen representatives of Rockbridge, Bath and Augusta counties, the city of Lexington and business owners, as well as BARC officials.

Through BARC Connects, the cooperative has been a national leader in developing an entire fiber-to-the-home network to bring world-class speed to an underserved area in western Virginia.

Warner said he was impressed with BARC's responsiveness and called it the equivalent of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's rural electrification program in the 1930s when electric cooperatives first lit up the countryside.

"Broadband is not going to mean economic success. But the absence of broadband is going to mean your community is going to get the short end of the stick. The absence of broadband means your kids are not going to get a fair shake in this economy," he said, noting that recent congressional appropriations have been aimed at expanding access to broadband.

"This country needs the same commitment to broadband that Roosevelt made to rural electrification in the 30s. I think in this past year, people get that in a visceral way that they never got beforehand," Warner added.

BARC CEO Mike Keyser said the session with Warner covered valuable ground. "He sees co-ops as a real solution to the problem of getting universal access to broadband."

CENTRAL VIRGINIA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Warner hosted a roundtable with directors and leaders from Central Virginia Electric Cooperative and Firefly Fiber Broadband on April 8 at Piedmont Virginia Community College. County officials from Albemarle, Goochland and Louisa were in attendance, as well as representatives from National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation and NRECA. The senator was briefed on

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PHOTO COURTESY CENTRAL VIRGINIA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Sen. Warner visits with CVEC
President and CEO Gary Wood.

Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative Again Named Top 10 Virginia Employer

For the fourth consecutive year, Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative has been named 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., said, “We are pleased to have been recognized for the fourth year as one of the Best Places to Work in Virginia. We were first recognized on this list of 100 exceptional companies in 2018; we are honored to have been ranked number nine in the Medium Employer Category (100-249 U.S. employees) for 2021. Our entire team is very proud of this honor as it is primarily based on feedback from our employees, as it should be.”

This statewide awards program is designed by Virginia Business magazine and Best Companies Group to identify and recognize the best places of employment across Virginia. To be considered for participation, companies 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 one year.

This year, over two hundred applications were received from organizations across the state that completed a two-part survey 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 accounted for 25% of the total evaluation. The second part consisted of an employee survey to measure the overall employee



From left, Sarah Bratten, Will Garnett, Sarah Vaughan and Jay Belknap.

experience. This segment of the process was worth 75% of the overall evaluation. The combined scores were then tallied to determine the top companies and the final ranking. Best Companies Group managed the overall registration and survey process; this included analyzing nominee surveys and utilizing its expertise to compile the final ranking.

Lee has served as president and CEO of MEC for 13 years and states, “We hold each of our dedicated employees in high reverence, and it's very gratifying that they view MEC as a great place to work ... they deserve it, they are an outstanding group. I'm fortunate to be a part of this great organization and commend MEC, its board of directors, my management team and my outstanding co-workers for their efforts on behalf of those we serve ... our Members. This honor affirms the combined efforts of every employee at MEC ... and reinforces the fact that no one person or department can make an organization a great place to work. It takes everyone ... it takes a team.”

– Report by Priscilla Whirley, Communications Specialist, Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative.

Sen. Warner Visits BARC and CVEC (Continued)

CVEC's commitment to renewable energy and improving reliability as well as its efforts to provide and expand rural broadband in Central Virginia.

Conversation centered on the need for broadband in the area, regardless of the electric provider. Gary Wood, president of CVEC and Firefly Fiber Broadband, discussed the new regional partnership that will turn that need into reality.

“Firefly is partnering with Rappahannock Electric Cooperative and Dominion Energy to find a solution to the digital divide for counties in Central Virginia by offering universal broadband service to all underserved households and businesses,” said Gary. “Firefly is committed to offering world class, gigabit-speed fiber broadband service to the most rural addresses. Living in the country should not preclude residents from advancing their education, businesses or ability to connect with the outside world for work or pleasure. We are excited to leverage Firefly's internet service and this partnership to bring about change that is long overdue.”

Louisa County was the first county to join the partnership in March 2021. Duane Adams, a Louisa County supervisor noted, “We want 100% of the people of our county to



PHOTO COURTESY THE OFFICE OF SENATOR MARK WARNER

have the option as it goes by their house. The other challenge we have in Louisa County, we are served by three electric providers. CVEC in the western end, REC in the middle and Dominion in the eastern end towards Richmond. We had to get all of those players to the table and get Firefly to the table and work something out. The only thing we could have done worse than not providing a solution, is to provide half of our citizens a solution. That would make the problem worse.”

Applauding CVEC and Firefly for their innovative approach to expanding broadband in rural areas, Warner reiterated his belief that high-speed internet is an important tool in leveling the playing field between urban and rural America.

– Reports by Steven Johnson, Editor, Cooperative Living, and Melissa Gay, Communications and Member Services Manager, Central Virginia Electric Cooperative.



Choptank Fiber Connects First Customer

From left, Dan Burt, Manager of Smart Grid Fiber Plant; Tom Tyndall, Vice President of Member Services; Sherry Hollingsworth and Gordon Hollingsworth, first Choptank Fiber customers; Tim McGaha, Vice President of Technical Services; Jeffrey Rathell, Chairman of the Board and Talbot Director; Mike Malandro, President and CEO of Choptank Electric Cooperative and President of Choptank Fiber.

Choptank Fiber, Choptank Electric Cooperative's wholly owned broadband subsidiary, delivered broadband service to its first customer on April 15.

Choptank Electric Cooperative welcomed elected officials Gov. Larry Hogan; Sen. Steve Hershey, Sen. Addie Eckardt and Sen. Mary Beth Carozza, members of the Eastern Shore Delegation; Caroline County government and Office of Rural Broadband representatives; along with employees and staff and held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to mark the special occasion.

Gov. Hogan commemorated the occasion by presenting an official citation to recognize the importance of Choptank Fiber's ribbon cutting and honor Choptank Electric Cooperative's commitment to expanding access to broadband on the Eastern Shore.

Choptank Fiber's first official customers are Gordon and Sherry Hollingsworth of Caroline County. Sherry's grandfather, Henry Lister, was one of Choptank Electric Cooperative's first members, so being part of the broadband experience and being the first customer is a monumental occasion.

"Gordon and I are extremely excited and honored to be part of this incredible service. We really appreciate the outstanding work of Choptank Electric's employees," said Sherry Hollingsworth. "From simply searching the web, keeping in contact with friends and finally getting to facetime our grandchildren, it will be a blessing to finally have reliable internet service."

The rural community is one of many on the Eastern Shore that lack access to fast, reliable internet service. Choptank Fiber's goal is to serve all the underserved members of Choptank Electric Cooperative — with a "No Home Left Behind" philosophy.



Gov. Hogan commemorated the occasion by presenting an official citation to recognize the importance of Choptank Fiber's ribbon cutting and honor Choptank Electric Cooperative's commitment to expanding access to broadband on the Eastern Shore. In this picture, Gov. Hogan presented Jeff Rathell, Chairman of the Board, with the citation.

"Our real goal is to change the quality of life for rural members on the Eastern Shore," said Mike Malandro, president and CEO of Choptank Electric Cooperative. "With over 650 miles of a fiber backbone, our smart grid brings us closer to the rural unserved than any other entity out there." Malandro recognized the Eastern Shore Delegation for their hard work and dedication in Annapolis and thanked Choptank Electric members. "I am thankful to our members who literally gave us the vote of confidence to move forward — through member regulation."

"We have been so successful over the years at delivering electric service to rural residents. ... Today, broadband service and internet access have become almost as important as electric service was over 80 years ago. I am pleased that we have found a way to deliver this life-changing service to our members," said Jeff Rathell, chairman of the Cooperative Board of Directors.

Choptank Fiber plans to have its first 50 customers hooked up by end of June 2021. Learn more about Choptank Fiber at choptankfiber.com.

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

Potter Earns Leadership Accolades



Danielle Potter, Manager of Human Resources, Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative.

Danielle Potter, manager of human resources at Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative, recently graduated from Leadership Halifax County, an educational program designed to identify and encourage emerging leaders in the community and help develop their skillsets.

Through self-awareness, skill practice, teambuilding and classroom instruction, Danielle, along with 20 other graduates, attended nine sessions to improve leadership skills to foster and facilitate positive change in her workplace and community. These sessions included tourism and economic development, local and state government, health and human services, agriculture, education and entrepreneurship.

Danielle holds a master’s degree from East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C., and has been in the human resources field for over eight years. She began her career with MEC in October 2020 and is currently studying for her human resource management certification. Danielle resides in Halifax County with her husband and two daughters.

– Report by Priscilla Whirley, Communications Specialist, Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative.

Allwine Joins Northern Neck

Northern Neck Electric Cooperative is proud to announce the hiring of Kyle Allwine as public affairs manager. Kyle was previously the vice president of membership and government affairs for the Fredericksburg Regional Chamber of Commerce, representing their 850 business members and their 30,000 employees.

Kyle is a graduate of University of Mary Washington, where he studied history and historic preservation. He also holds an MBA from University of Mary Washington. He is a member of the board of directors for the Greater Fredericksburg Habitat for Humanity and the Rappahannock United Way. He currently lives in Spotsylvania, Va., with his wife, Libby, and his son, Kyle. In his free time, Kyle is a hobbyist woodworker.

– Report submitted by Jay Garner, former Public Affairs Manager, Northern Neck Electric Cooperative.



Kyle Allwine, Public Affairs Manager, Northern Neck Electric Cooperative.

REC Names Director of Operations and Construction in Culpeper



Kevin Pories Director of Operations and Construction – Culpeper, Rappahannock Electric Cooperative.

Rappahannock Electric Cooperative has promoted Kevin Pories to director of operations and construction at the cooperative’s Culpeper office.

Kevin began his career at REC in 1989 as an apprentice lineworker. Since then, he has worked his way through the various lineworker progressions, eventually becoming general foreman in 2018. His years of experience and countless hours in the field give him firsthand knowledge of what it takes to safely construct power lines, as well as instruct and supervise line crews.

“Kevin has over 30 years of field experience, garnering a rich knowledge of the electric distribution industry,” said Shawn McDonough, REC’s manager of the western region. “His knowledge and experience is critical in building a strong, resilient system to meet — and go above and beyond — our member-owners’ expectations.”

In this role, Kevin is responsible for the coordination and daily management of operations for construction services out of REC’s Culpeper office. He oversees the management of equipment, tools and personnel; creates long- and short-term construction planning for the counties of Fauquier, Rappahannock, Culpeper, Madison, Greene, Albemarle, Orange and Spotsylvania; and maintains and promotes safety procedures. Kevin resides in Culpeper County.

– Report by Rachel Conrad, Communications Specialist, Rappahannock Electric Cooperative.

Hildebrand Joins A&N Electric Cooperative

Shawn Hildebrand joined the A&N Electric Cooperative family on April 12 and will become vice president of corporate services for A&N Electric. He is scheduled to assume the responsibilities of Penny Fowler who has been with the cooperative for over 34 years and will retire in June.

Shawn is no stranger to Virginia cooperatives. He is the former CEO and general manager of Craig-Botetourt Electric Cooperative, a position he held for 11 years. Prior to that he worked as the manager of public relations and strategic services for Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative. During his 20-year career in the co-op world, Shawn also held positions on numerous committees with VMDAEC.

Shawn is a graduate of James Madison University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in business administration in finance and management and later earned a master's degree in business administration.

As vice president of corporate services, Shawn will have the primary responsibility of leading the following departments: Accounting/Finance, Member Services/Products, Regulatory Compliance, Information Technology, Strategic Planning and Communications.

Shawn's prior co-op work experience and educational background will bring a wealth of knowledge to the departments he will lead and will be a tremendous asset to the strategic direction of the cooperative.

– Report by Jay Diem, Communications Specialist, A&N Electric Cooperative.



Shawn Hildebrand, Vice President of Corporate Services (June), A&N Electric Cooperative.

Association and Four Member Co-ops Recognized for Excellence

Effective member engagement is more important than ever. Each year, the NRECA Spotlight on Excellence Awards program recognizes the outstanding work produced and submitted by electric cooperative communication and marketing professionals from across the country. Sixteen categories reflect the wide scope and valuable contributions of co-op communicators today. Virginia, Maryland and Delaware electric cooperatives were well represented and awarded with several well-deserved honors. Below are this year's winners from the VMD electric co-op family.



2021 WINNERS



BEST FEATURE STORY
Gold
VMDAEC
"On the Outside, Looking In"
Steven Johnson



BEST COLUMN
Gold
VMDAEC
"Viewpoint"
Richard Johnstone



BEST SPECIAL PUBLICATION – LARGE
Gold (Classification 4)
Delaware Electric Cooperative
"Delaware Living" 2020
Jeremy Tucker



BEST INTERNAL NEWS PUBLICATION
Silver (Classification 4)
Rappahannock Electric Cooperative
"REC Powerlines"
(March, July and August issues)



BEST SPECIAL PUBLICATION – LARGE
Silver (Classification 4)
Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative
Biomass Booklet
Leslie Khamsivone



BEST ANNUAL REPORT TO MEMBERS
Silver (Classification 4)
Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative
NOVEC 2020 Annual Report
Leslie Khamsivone and Priscilla Knight



BEST DIGITAL STORYTELLING
Silver (Classification 4)
Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative
"Spirit of SVEC" Video



INDIVIDUAL AD
Silver (Classification 4)
Rappahannock Electric Cooperative
"We're All In This Together"

CONGRATULATIONS!

NOVEC Offers Earth Day Tips for Living 'Green'

In recognition of Earth Day on April 22, Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative offers ways to save energy and money by living green.

"The greening of America starts with each and every one of us," says Victor Ludena, a NOVEC energy specialist. "By using energy efficiently at home, consumers can reduce their energy bills, help improve the environment, and enhance the quality of their lives."

LIVING GREEN TIPS

- Change an air conditioner's filter regularly, as recommended by the manufacturer. A clogged filter reduces airflow and causes a unit to use more electricity. Contact NOVEC Energy Solutions at novecenergysolutions.com for "Home Filtration" service.
- On hot days, close window treatments on the sunny sides of the house to help block solar rays.
- Reduce an electric water heater's temperature to 120 degrees and between hot and warm on a gas heater.
- Use LED lightbulbs. Old-fashion incandescent light bulbs create 10% light and 90% heat. LED bulbs create almost no heat, use 40 to 80% less energy, and last much longer.
- Use the dishwasher. Washing a full load in the dishwasher uses less energy and hot water than washing by hand, especially with an ENERGY STAR-certified dishwasher.
- Clean a clothes dryer's lint trap before every use to increase efficiency as much as 30%, and prevent fires.
- Install a programmable thermostat and set it to run an air conditioner at 75 to 78 degrees in summer. Set it a little higher when leaving home for several hours or days, especially when going on vacation.

GROCERY SHOPPING

- Buy locally produced meats, fruits, and vegetables to support local farmers and reduce transportation emissions.



PHOTO BY DIANE GINSBERG FOR THE GARDEN CLUB OF VIRGINIA'S HISTORIC GARDEN WEEK

- Drink water from the tap, refrigerator dispenser, or in reusable bottles instead of one-use plastic bottles, which collect in landfills. Change water filters according to manufacturer's instructions.
- Avoid foods packaged in bulky plastic containers that end up in landfills.

GREEN LANDSCAPING

- Plant native plants. They need less water since they are acclimated to local climates.
- Plant flowers in planters, garden beds, or wooded areas. Flowers absorb carbon dioxide, provide beauty, and help bees and butterflies pollenate, which is vital for Earth.
- Use a power mower that can mulch grass clippings. Better yet, use a push mower. Clippings fertilize grass, retard water evaporation. Bagged clippings have to be hauled to landfills.
- Sweep your driveway and walkways instead of hosing them.

Adults can learn more ways to live green and save energy dollars at novec.com/save. Children can learn more about energy at Kid's Korner, novec.com/kids.

— Report by Priscilla Knight, Senior Communications Specialist, Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative.

Reliability: Protecting Power Lines from Wildlife

Trees are the top cause of power outages, and Rappahannock Electric Cooperative's robust vegetation management team works to keep that number as low as possible. But there's another second common culprit for power outages to REC member-owners — wildlife and reptiles. Squirrels alone, for instance, can cause 1,000 outages in a single year.

When it comes to wayward critters, REC also has a program in place to protect the creatures and also safeguard members' electric service. REC tracks the cause of outages as they occur. Engineers and line crews then use software to determine the areas where animals cause the greatest number of outages.

Line crews and contractors deploy to those locations to install devices known as animal guards on transformers and other related equipment.

"We take the data and see where the animal-related outages are, and that's what we focus on," said Director of Operations and Construction Daniel Dewey. Daniel reports to REC's Bowling Green office and serves the Eastern Region. He noted it's a constant challenge.



"The squirrels especially are relentless," Daniel said. To keep them at bay, he said crews are also adding padding to existing animal guards and even wrapping some poles in plastic to keep the critters from climbing them.

Even with all the advances in technology, one little animal still has the potential to affect so many members. But week by week, REC is working to outsmart them and keep reliable electricity flowing where it's supposed to go.

— Report by Rachel Conrad, Communications Specialist, Rappahannock Electric Cooperative.

Campaign Season

Once again, campaign season in Virginia is upon us, and with it comes renewed excitement for the rollout of our Co-ops Vote programs for the 2021 election cycle. With 31 candidates running statewide and the entire House of Delegates up for reelection, the VMDAEC Government Affairs team is ready to help your cooperative engage with legislators and candidates to share the co-op story.

The ultimate goal of our Co-ops Vote programs is to be proactive. When newly elected state officials step into the job, they are bombarded with new information and outreach from every special interest group. With your help, we can ensure that newly elected leaders walk into their first day on the job already knowing the cooperative story. When we showcase our members' innovations in energy and broadband and critical role cooperatives serve in their communities, we prepare new leaders support our efforts as they develop policies at the state and local level.

So, what does candidate engagement look like? We know that strong co-ops have strong member engagement. The same is true for candidates and their voters. The best way we as co-ops can engage with candidates is to show them firsthand how we embody the Seven Cooperative Principles each and every day. As we dive into this campaign season, we will be reaching out to our member cooperatives with



opportunities to host candidates for tours and events to illustrate the essential service we provide throughout rural and suburban Virginia.

If candidate education is the first pillar of Co-ops Vote, the second is encouraging member civic engagement. While we are helping candidates become co-op champions by the time they take the oath of office, we must also be educating and empowering our members to be active participants in local and state elections. Through hosting voter registration drives, supporting candidate forums and educating members about important voting deadlines, we can help members become informed voters who know how the candidates on their ballots will represent their community and their co-op.

We have 7 months to go until election day — with your support, we are ready to show each and every candidate the cooperative difference.

— Report by Sadie Gary, Director of Legislative Affairs, VMDAEC.

'Bird's-Eye View' Boosts REC'S Reliability

The pandemic provided many of us a chance to step back and gain a new perspective. For a handful of lineworkers at REC, that is true in a literal sense — and that new perspective will directly benefit member-owners.

Since last year, a small group of lineworkers has been dispatched — with unmanned aerial devices — to find potential problems before they can cause an outage. They are using the technology not only to inspect lines and equipment, but also to search for trees near REC's rights-of-way that could fall and cause an outage.



Bird's-eye view of a right-of-way on the REC system.

As REC sought ways to keep crews safe through social distancing, lineworkers Jake Michael and Matt Fauver, who both report to REC's office in Front Royal, were among those working a bit differently over the past few months.

The lineworkers have walked miles of rights-of-way. They have driven four-wheelers through rugged, often rocky terrain. And they have deployed unmanned aerial devices to inspect miles of power lines and rights-of-way that would typically take much longer to cover. A lot of the territory they inspected included mountainsides, with steep inclines.

"Redeploying select lineworkers furthered three critical goals for REC: safety, reliability and the implementation of new technology to better serve member-owners," said John D. Hewa, REC president and CEO. "Even in these challenging times, our crews continue to focus on providing reliable electric service. That focus will never change."

One key area the lineworkers have focused on includes trees outside the traditional right-of-way. Partnering with REC's already robust Vegetation Management department, the lineworkers have helped find dead, diseased and dying trees that could potentially fall onto power lines and related equipment. In an effort to improve reliability, REC now looks for potential hazard trees up to 25 feet outside of the right-of-way.

"It saves so much time, because otherwise you are going on foot or calling for someone to get a four-wheeler," Michael said of the drones. "It gives you the chance to get a bird's-eye view of the problem as opposed to looking up from the ground. I'd say it cuts the time in half."

As lineworkers inspected the rights-of-way, tree-trimming crews would come in behind them to trim or take down the hazard trees, which are marked with red tape. While the work has focused on prevention, the projects will also help with outage restoration.

— Report by Rachel Conrad, Communications Specialist, Rappahannock Electric Cooperative.

A&N Electric Recognized for Second Straight Year

The Arbor Day Foundation has named A&N Electric Cooperative a 2021 Tree Line USA in honor of its commitment to proper tree pruning, planting and care in the provider's service area. The cooperative has received the designation for the second consecutive year.

Tree Line USA, a partnership between the Foundation and the National Association of State Foresters, recognizes public and private utilities for pursuing practices that protect and enhance America's urban trees. Tree Line USA promotes the dual goals of delivering safe and reliable electricity while maintaining healthy community forests.

"Trees are a critical part of urban landscapes all across the United States," said Dan Lambe, president of the Arbor Day Foundation. "They provide important benefits to residents, including clean air, clean water and a tolerable climate. Service providers like A&N Electric Cooperative



demonstrate that it's possible for trees and utilities to coexist for the benefit of communities and citizens."

A&N Electric Cooperative achieved Tree Line USA by meeting five program standards. Utilities must follow industry standards for quality tree care; provide annual worker training in best tree care practices; sponsor a tree planting and public education program; maintain a tree-based energy conservation program; and participate in an Arbor Day celebration.

– Report by Jay Diem, Communications Specialist, A&N Electric Cooperative.

VMDAEC Welcomes Newest Training Center Instructor



Curtis Craig

Curtis Craig joins the Association as a training instructor following a 30-year career with Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative. He served the co-op for his first eight years as a system operator before moving to technical services for the duration of his career. Primarily focused on metering and substation, including station upgrades and regulator and recloser controls, Curtis was also involved with several AMR projects.

"One of my proudest achievements was joining the Steering Committee of the North Carolina Electric Meter School and being inducted into its hall of fame," said Curtis.

Curtis, who has retired and enjoys gardening, following University of Virginia sports and barbecuing, will now head the Association's new Meter Technician Apprenticeship Program at the Training Center in Palmyra. For a full description of the curriculum and a schedule, contact Todd Butcher at tbutcher@vmdaec.com.