

## Choptank Electric Holds 83rd Annual Meeting Virtually

On April 29, the Choptank Electric Cooperative Board of Directors and staffers welcomed members virtually at the Denton headquarters to conduct the 83rd Choptank Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting. The meeting was held virtually due to COVID-19 protocols.

At 5:45 p.m., the Cooperative began with an informational video loop and the business meeting starting promptly at 6 p.m. There were 340 registrants for the virtual meeting, with 206 of those being members.

The business meeting began with Jeffrey Rathell, chairman of the board, introducing fellow board members and staff and proceeding with the election.

William Edwards, chair of the Credentials and Elections Committee, announced first that the petitions for each of the three incumbent candidates had been approved by the committee. Because there was only one approved director candidate for each district, the committee invoked Bylaws section 4.06(b).

This section states that in the event of an uncontested election, Choptank Electric may forgo the balloting process. Bob Thompson, Ocean Pines District, oversaw the election of the following board members: Olin Davis, Kent County; Doug Scott, Dorchester County; and Bob Arnold, Queen Anne's County. All three were elected to a 3-year term. Mike Malandro, president and CEO of Choptank Electric Cooperative, reported to the membership about the co-op's accomplishments in 2020 and plans for the future regarding broadband and continued service to members.



Choptank Electric Cooperative headquarters in Denton, Md.

"Choptank is stepping in to solve the rural broadband problem like we did with electricity," Mike said. "We continue our work to seek out federal, state and local grant funds to expedite our broadband deployment as we steadily connect new customers. Updates on our progress and general information can be found at [choptankfiber.com](http://choptankfiber.com). Our motto is 'No home left behind.'"

The meeting ended with the drawing for door prizes that were bill credits ranging from \$100 to \$500 and the "Luck of the Draw" scholarship, which awarded ten \$1,000 scholarships. Twenty-seven members submitted scholarship applications.

The Annual Meeting was a huge success virtually. Details concerning the 84th Annual Meeting will be announced in September and will be published in the 2021-2022 Member Guide.

A full recording of the meeting is available on YouTube at [youtu.be/vgnWZCGjmdg](https://youtu.be/vgnWZCGjmdg).

– Report by Elizabeth Hallett, Manager of Marketing and Communications, Choptank Electric Cooperative.

## In Memoriam: Bob Cleveland

Longtime electric cooperative leader Robert Newton "Bob" Cleveland, a former CEO of Old Dominion Electric Cooperative and the VMD Association, died April 20 at the age of 94. Bob served as CEO of both organizations from October 1994 to April 1995. He joined the two groups, then a federated organization, after he retired to fill a temporary vacancy.

A native of Franklinton, Ky., Bob became part of the co-op movement when he was 21 as a farmer director for the Kentucky Rural Electric Cooperative. He worked to convince his neighbors that electricity was worth the effort to acquire it and lobbied the legislature to pass bills to fund it. He subsequently became director of administrative services for the Kentucky Rural Electric Cooperative Corp.

Bob also served as general manager of the Colorado statewide; executive vice president and general manager of North Carolina Electric Membership Corp.; and a president and CEO of Buckeye Power in Ohio from 1977 until 1989. He also served as a director and chairman of the Electric Power Research Institute.

In retirement, he enjoyed spending time with his family in the Winchester, Va., area.

Condolences can be left on his tribute page: [ompsfuneralhome.com/obituary/robert-newton-cleveland](https://ompsfuneralhome.com/obituary/robert-newton-cleveland).

– Report by Steven Johnson, Vice President, Communications, VMD Association.



Bob with his late wife of 69 years, Joanna.





## Solar Prices and Customer Prodding Push Rural Electric Co-ops Past Coal

ODEC exemplifies a shift that's underway as rural electric co-ops shed resistance to solar and renewables and take advantage of falling prices and new technology. [CLICK HERE TO READ MORE.](#)

## Froggy's Closet Founder Honored for Community Work

A [Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative](#) member has been honored with the Good Samaritan Award for her tireless efforts on behalf of foster children and other children who have been victims of abuse or neglect, or are at risk.

Tina Marie Scully of Winchester received the award at a May 5 ceremony at Froggy's Closet, a store she and volunteers operate to provide donations of clothing, books, toys and other items to needy children.

Froggy's Closet is part of [Families Reaching Out Group](#) (FROG), a nonprofit co-founded by Scully that also provides family mentoring and after-school enrichment for children in the Winchester area.

The Good Samaritan Award has been presented annually since 1968 by the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives to recognize an individual, a couple or a family who have rendered extraordinary service without seeking public recognition.

"We are beyond honored to recognize Tina Marie, who embodies the seventh cooperative principle of Concern for Community. Her dedication and selflessness follow in the tradition of our Good Samaritan Award," said Brian Mosier, president and CEO of the cooperative association.

Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative, based in Rockingham County, and Rappahannock Electric Cooperative, based in Fredericksburg, both have supported FROG through



From left, Greg Rogers, President/CEO; Bill Orndoff, SVEC board chair; Tina Marie Scully; Robbie Marchant, SVEC board member; and Preston Knight, public relations coordinator.

grants, recognizing the important role it plays in the area.

"Scully and her husband, Robert, have fostered several dozen children, which assuredly has made an immeasurable impact on these young lives and their families," said Greg Rogers, president of CEO of Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative, who presented the award. "The saying that "it takes a village to raise a child" meets a formidable foe in Tina Marie Scully."

In supporting Scully's nomination, Kim Stutzman, retired marketing director at Jim Stutzman Chevrolet-Cadillac and a Froggy's Closet volunteer, said Scully had made a positive difference in the lives of thousands of young children.

"Without a doubt, Tina Marie is an anomaly in her selfless care for others and her community," Stutzman said.

– Report by Steven Johnson, Vice President, Communications, VMD Association.

## SVEC Crew Helps Fallen Member

Fallen trees brought out Brandon Long and his crew. A fallen member brought out the best in them.

High winds caused widespread outages in Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative's territory on April 30. Long, a lead lineman, and linemen 2nd Class P.J. Jarvis and Jordan Jack, all of the Augusta District, discovered a member who was laying in her yard. The member says she had fallen and was on the ground several hours, unable to get anyone's attention until the SVEC crew spotted her.

Brandon lifted her and assisted her onto her porch. No major injuries from the situation were reported.

The member contacted SVEC the afternoon of April 30 and wanted to share how much she appreciated the co-op and the crew. Her granddaughter commented on a Facebook post about the crew's efforts that "the community needs more people like this."



From left, Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative's Brandon Long, P.J. Jarvis and Jordan Jack.

Everyone at SVEC would agree, though Brandon, P.J. and Jordan do not consider themselves as any special kind of heroes.

"Somebody's hollerin' for help," Brandon says, "you're going to help them."

– Report by Preston Knight, Public Relations Coordinator, Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative.



# “It Could’ve Been My Son”

Fundraising goal shattered, thanks to inspiration from a member and mom

When 85-year-old [Community Electric Cooperative](#) member Shelby “Mimi” Beale mailed a check to help support fundraising efforts for an injured line technician, she had no idea of the inspiration she would soon become. Her reason was simple, “It could’ve been my son,” she said, referring to Danny Beale, a line crew leader with the co-op.

While working to restore power following a February ice storm in Southside Virginia, Danville Utilities apprentice lineworker Jesse Flack sustained a life-altering injury. An energized line sent 7,200 volts of electric current traveling through the 24-year-old’s body. Flack was airlifted to the Burn Center at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem, N.C., flat-lining twice on the way, according to a family friend.

Flack survived after a long hospital stay and is currently in rehabilitation, but his mobility is forever limited. Doctors were forced to amputate one of his arms below the elbow and two toes. He also suffered a significant hole in his left thigh that was in contact with a bolt.

Serviceman W.H. Holland and Jonathan Powell, lead lineman on Beale’s crew at CEC, were inspired by the selfless act of their crewmate’s mother. Another crew member, Ryan Hewitt, attended the Power Line Worker Training Program at Southside Virginia Community College with Flack.

The crew was determined to do something, but that all changed following a CEC board meeting. President and CEO Steve Harmon informed the men of the board’s commitment to generously support their efforts. Powell’s reaction was “OK, we’re challenged.” With an ambitious goal of \$10,000, they got to work on a fundraiser selling ground sausage.

Holland, a Gaff-N-Go Lineworker Rodeo BBQ champion, is well known for his passion and skill in food prep. He compares his garage to a restaurant kitchen — maybe better. “He’ll take anything to the extreme and do the best he can,” Powell says of his crewmate and friend of 16 years.

The team was bombarded with orders immediately. Donations were even accepted at the co-op’s drive-up window. Two donated items, a custom 25-inch hand-painted sawblade courtesy of [Kenny’s Paintings](#) in Rocky Mount, Va., and a custom knife courtesy of [Mark Sperry](#), a journeyman blacksmith at Colonial Williamsburg and “[Forged in Fire](#)” champion (season 5, episode 18), were auctioned as well.

A total of 805 lbs. of locally made sausage was purchased. Overwhelmed by the response, Powell and Holland were humbled when they were informed of the co-op board’s decision to match the funds raised. A donation in the amount of \$13,000 was sent to Flack’s family via the Fallen Linemen Foundation.



W.H. Holland (left) stands in his garage kitchen with Jonathan Powell.

**“Their donation was particularly meaningful, in that it came during an unprecedented time for all of us, as we navigate life during a global pandemic – a time in which the Fallen Linemen Foundation has not been able to host its normal fund raising events.”**

– Kevin Dyson, President  
Fallen Linemen Foundation



Sawblade courtesy Kenny’s Paintings, Rocky Mount, Va.



Custom knife courtesy Mark Sperry.

“CEC’s generosity made it possible to financially support our fallen lineman in a way that we may not have been able to do,” says Kevin Dyson, president of the [Fallen Linemen Foundation](#), an organization committed to providing financial support to electric utility lineworkers injured while on the job and/or supporting organizations and institutions.

“This was a life-changing event,” says Holland, “and line work is a brotherhood, like with police officers or firefighters. There was a need, and we asked ourselves how we could raise money again.” A few years back when a neighboring electric co-op lineworker’s wife and children were injured in a car accident, Holland’s ground sausage raised much-needed funds for the family.

“We are proud of the great success in this effort to help one of our own,” says Harmon.

Although she refuses to accept any praise for her selfless act of kindness, Powell, Holland and the rest of the crew appreciate Mimi, who they say also thinks of them as her own, for raising the bar.

To date, more than \$61,000 has been donated to Flack’s family via [Go Fund Me](#). He continues to improve in rehabilitation but has a long road ahead of him.

– Report by Jim Robertson, Member Projects Specialist, VMD Association.

## Northern Neck Electric Recognized for Restoration Efforts

At the May 13 meeting of the Northumberland County Board of Supervisors, [Northern Neck Electric Cooperative](#) received recognition for its restoration efforts in the wake of the EF2 tornado that impacted the Lottsburg and Callao area in Northumberland County on May 3.

The Northumberland County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution unanimously recognizing the work of many organizations, including NNEC, for their efforts in the aftermath of the storm.

Del. Margaret Ransone, representing Virginia's 99th House of Delegates District, presented a Commonwealth of Virginia flag that was flown over the Capitol to the lineworkers of NNEC. Brad Hicks, president and CEO, and Bobby Franklin, line superintendent, accepted the flag on their behalf. Del. Ransone stated, "They train all year for events like this, and their preparation paid off. We are so thankful for their efforts in the face of challenging circumstances."

Sen. Ryan McDougle, representing Virginia's 4th Senate District, commended the groups as well, stating, "Northern Neck Electric Cooperative did a tremendous job to swiftly restore power. ... The successful response is a testament to



Del. Margaret Ransone with Northern Neck President and CEO Brad Hicks.

an organized effort, consistent communication, and effective leadership across the board."

In response to receiving the recognition, Hicks said, "Even when presented with significant challenges, our lineworkers rise to meet those challenges. I am thankful for this recognition from our community, because our lineworkers live in this community. It is our home. That is the NNEC difference."

– Report by Kyle Allwine, Public Affairs Manager, Northern Neck Electric Cooperative.

## Electric Co-ops Award More than \$60,000 in Scholarships

The Education Scholarship Foundation of the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives announced that it has awarded more than \$60,000 in college scholarships to deserving students for the 2021-22 school year.

The recipients are students whose parents live in areas served by electric cooperatives in the three states.

"We commend these students on their outstanding academic achievements," said Russell G. "Rusty" Brown, chair of the Education Scholarship Foundation Board and vice chairman of the board of directors at Northern Neck Electric Cooperative. "Our electric cooperatives are delighted to provide support to these worthy students, as they represent a future generation of leaders in their communities."



The Foundation awarded Worth Hudson Scholarships of \$1,000 each to 57 students. They are named in honor of Hudson, the first chairman of the Education Scholarship Foundation Board and former chairman of the board of directors of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative in Chase City, Va.

The Foundation also approved three co-op-specific scholarships. A Gertrude Winston Memorial Scholarships in the amount of \$1,000 was awarded to a student in the Rappahannock Electric Cooperative service territory. The program was established in memory of the mother of longtime REC board member Richard Oliver.

The C. D Hypes Memorial Scholarship in the amount of \$1,500 was awarded to a student in the Craig-Botetourt

Electric Cooperative service territory. Hypes was an educator and a board member at New Castle, Va.-based CBEC.

A Cook Scholarship of \$1,000 was awarded to a student in the Delaware Electric Cooperative service territory, donated by DEC members Larry and Leslie Cook.

The Foundation also awarded a special scholarship in memory of the late Bill Sherrod, longtime editor of *Cooperative Living* magazine, to a student from Choptank Electric Cooperative in Maryland, who is planning to major in English and pursue a career as a writer and author.

Since 2001, the Foundation has provided approximately 780 scholarships totaling more than \$800,000 to aspiring college students as well as to the next generation of electric lineworkers.

"Electric cooperatives have a long commitment of supporting education as a way of fostering leadership and enhancing the quality of life in the communities that we serve," said Brian Mosier, president and CEO of the Cooperative Association. "We're extremely proud to be able to help these deserving young people from electric cooperative service areas continue their education, whether at a college or university, or in learning a trade."

The Foundation is funded through tax-deductible donations and bequests from individuals, proceeds from fundraising events and CoBank's Sharing Success Program. One hundred percent of donations go to students for scholarships. For information on donating to the Foundation, visit [vmdaec.com/scholarship](http://vmdaec.com/scholarship).

– Report by Steven Johnson, Vice President, Communications, VMD Association.



## NOVEC Follows 'Concern for Community' Principle in Southern Virginia

Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative's service territory is in Northern Virginia, but its influence jumps to Southern Virginia where NOVEC's Halifax County Biomass Plant generates almost 50 megawatts of electricity. As part of NOVEC's Concern for Community, the sixth cooperative principle, NOVEC and the biomass plant support community programs.

In April, NOVEC donated \$500 to the Virginia Tech Cooperative Extension Service's Buy Fresh, Buy Local program. The statewide initiative works to bring farmers, food businesses, state agencies and stakeholders across the Commonwealth together to help market local food. The program's Heart of Virginia chapter covers 11 counties in the South Central region.



NOVEC Community and Government Liaison Shelia Bradley (second from left) presents a \$500 check to Agriculture and Natural Resource Extension agents. Pictured are Bruce Jones (left) Appomattox County; Rebekah Slabach, Halifax County; and Joanne Jones, Charlotte County.

"NOVEC's donation will help offset printing costs for the 2021 Buy Fresh, Buy Local guide, which the Heart of Virginia chapter will distribute throughout its 11 counties," explains Shelia Bradley, NOVEC's community and government liaison in Halifax. "Supporting local agricultural businesses helps farmers financially, improves the health of people who consume fresh produce, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions coming from shipping produce here from out-of-state food companies."

Learn more at [buylocalvirginia.org](http://buylocalvirginia.org).

## NOVEC Supports Halifax County Heritage & Antique Machinery Festival

NOVEC donated \$500 to the [Halifax County Heritage & Antique Machinery Festival](#), which occurred on May 7 and 8. Each year, the festival highlights the county's agricultural history with demonstrations and exhibits of antique machinery and equipment once used by farmers.

Since its start 17 years ago, the festival has provided approximately \$50,000 for physical improvements to county-owned properties, including an access road, camper and RV hookups, building maintenance, and fencing. The festival has also provided \$50,000 in scholarships for local students going into vocational or agricultural careers, and for teacher mini-grants, which provide much needed classrooms supplies.

Conner says, "There is no way we could have done what we've done without the support of our many sponsors; NOVEC is chief among them."

"Bobby is an amazing man," says Bradley about the 81-year-old festival chairman, who served on [Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative's](#) board of directors for 30 years and was Halifax County's circuit court clerk for 25 years. "He has a photographic memory, is a hilarious storyteller, a tinkerer extraordinaire, and he has a massive vision for the Heritage Festival. Every community needs someone like him!"

Mike Davis (right), NOVEC Halifax County Biomass Plant's fuel procurement manager, presents a \$500 check to Bobby Conner, chairman of the Halifax County Heritage & Antique Machinery Festival Committee.



The gristmill is one of the newest additions to the Halifax County Heritage & Antique Machinery Festival.

Mike Davis (left) and Bobby Conner stand at a church built for the festival.





## On the Move: EMPOWER Connects 1,000th Subscriber

Fountain Creek Baptist Church, in the Brink Community of Greenville County, is the 1,000th recipient of this new service. Access to [EMPOWER Broadband's](#) high-speed internet brings enhanced opportunities for the Church's ministry and its congregation.

Fountain Creek's pastor, Bobby Griles, spoke excitedly when considering the opportunities for their ministry provided by high-speed access to the internet. Pastor Griles indicates, "Having broadband available allows us to share God's grace and love throughout the world. We are blessed to be able to have this valuable technology. We are very pleased that our cooperative stepped up to provide this critical service to our church and our community."

The availability of high-speed broadband has been a rare commodity in Southside Virginia's rural communities as construction costs for deployment are high because of the region's lower population density. Accordingly, traditional internet providers have veered away from connected high-speed deployment in rural areas; so once again, rural residents are meeting their own needs through the locally owned, led and operated EMPOWER Broadband, which is a subsidiary of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative.

EMPOWER Broadband President and CEO John C. Lee, Jr., stated, "The communities served by EMPOWER Broadband consist of homes, businesses and organizations ... all of which need the access and opportunities afforded by high-speed internet. When EMPOWER Broadband was established, we emphasized that the only business plan that would allow us to successfully bring this much needed service to our sparsely populated region, would require a highly disciplined and structured approach."



"While we recognize that we still have a great deal of work to do, we are very pleased with our current position, especially given the challenges presented by the pandemic, which most definitely impacted our progress, and the fact that we have been refining processes to maximize the efficiency of this massive and capital intensive project. And while our prudent and methodical approach to this effort has taken time, it is the same approach that we have used at our cooperative for 80-plus years to offer excellent electric service, maintain a strong fiscal position, and keep our rates affordable."

"EMPOWER's team is successfully hitting our established milestones and continues to grow as does the demand for our services. We're proud to be making progress and proud to deliver this much needed service. We recognize there is much work left to do and that those we serve are eagerly anticipating broadband service. Accordingly, we're methodically building EMPOWER's organizational structure to meet the broadband and communications needs of the families, farms and businesses we proudly serve."

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

## Firefly to Expand in Louisa County Sooner than Planned

Firefly Fiber Broadband, a wholly owned subsidiary of Central Virginia Electric Cooperative, announced that their fiber broadband and voice-over-IP phone service will be available in the Henson's Store area of Louisa County sooner than anticipated. CVEC started fiber construction at the Henson's Store substation more quickly than planned due to securing additional construction crews to work on the build, partly due to the project commitment from Louisa County earlier this year. Louisa residents along Poindexter Road and South Spotswood Trail and east of Poindexter Road along Jack Jouett and Byrd Mill will receive service from the Henson's Store build as early as summer 2021. To determine if your home is included in this build, visit [fireflyva.com](http://fireflyva.com) and click "Check Availability" to search your address.

Firefly is currently offering gigabit speed fiber broadband to CVEC members residing in the Cash's Corner and Zion areas. Fiber construction is currently underway at the Ferncliff and Doubleday substations and connections in those areas is set for fall 2021. Residents who have not yet signed up but are wishing to get service should contact Firefly to register at [fireflyva.com](http://fireflyva.com) or 833-473-3591.

In a press release on March 1, a partnership with Louisa County and Firefly, Rappahannock Electric Cooperative and Dominion Energy was announced to bring high-speed internet to all underserved homes and businesses in Louisa.



Adding fiber so it can be "lashed" together to the steel wire that is added to the electric pole during the fiber build.

PHOTO COURTESY: S&N COMMUNICATIONS

Firefly and CVEC have added crews to their construction workforce and the expansion of the CVEC fiber and Firefly services in Henson's Store will facilitate extension of broadband availability into the REC electric territory. Make-ready work will begin soon on the REC system, and announcements will be made regarding where the build will begin as well as the timeline for the construction.

The entire fiber build in Louisa County is slated for completion by the end of 2025.

– Report by Melissa Gay, Member Service and Communications Manager, Central Virginia Electric Cooperative.

## Co-op People

### MEC Director Recognized for Advanced Leadership Certification

Peggy Lee, a member of the [Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative](#) Board of Directors, recently earned and was awarded the Board Leadership Certificate from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.



A continually evolving energy industry places ever-changing demands on electric cooperative directors; accordingly, serving in those roles requires an increasing knowledge of ongoing changes in electric utility operation and management, competent governance skills, and a sound knowledge of cooperative principles. MEC, and its directors, have a commitment to continue both training and education to ensure MEC continues to succeed in a changing environment and that the organization is well-positioned to make the most informed and beneficial decisions on behalf of the Cooperative's membership. Through its affiliation with NRECA, MEC's directors participate in these virtual programs and workshops to maintain and sharpen their body of knowledge, to the benefit of the cooperative, by providing general overall guidance and establishing a strong strategic focus.

The NRECA BLC is part of the continuing Director Education Certificate Program and recognizes individuals who further their professional governance development beyond the basic requirements of a Credentialed Cooperative Director. Directors who have attained the BLC have completed ten advanced credits in issues-oriented courses.

MEC Board Chairman, David Jones, states, "Each member of our Board of Directors recognizes the responsibilities conveyed upon them as they represent their fellow cooperative members and their communities. Peggy's completion of this Credential program demonstrates her strong commitment and ongoing preparation to serve the members of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative and Southside Virginia."

Peggy has served on the MEC board since 2008 and resides in Freeman, Virginia. She also serves on the Governance Committees for MEC and is a representative of the Cooperative's Emporia District. Peggy holds a master's degree in health administration and is a retired executive director of the United States Department of Agriculture's Brunswick County Farm Service Agency. In 2020, Peggy was elected to the National Society of Leadership and Success, Sigma Alpha Pi.

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

### BARC Welcomes New COO

[BARC Electric Cooperative](#) is pleased to welcome Chris Botulinski as chief operations officer for the cooperative. Chris will lead daily electric operations and help execute BARC's mission to improve the quality of life in the community it serves through energy and technology innovation.



Chris comes to BARC from Southwestern Electric Cooperative Inc. in Illinois where he was vice president of engineering. He brings over 18 years of experience within electric utility/cooperative, heavy industrial and renewable energy systems to BARC. Chris and his family are in the process of relocating to the Shenandoah Valley.

Chris is a graduate of the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, where he earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering with a power emphasis. His work experience in the energy sector has spanned across the United States and Australia in various roles at cooperatives, investor-owned utilities and in the solar industry. Throughout his career, Chris has served as a leader and innovator in developing key solutions and systems in the electric industry.

As COO, Chris will have the primary responsibility of leading electric operations, field engineering, technical services, information technology, logistics and right-of-way management.

Chris' prior co-op and industry experience 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 Tish Blackwell, Communications Specialist, BARC Electric Cooperative.

### Barrack Promoted to IT Manager at Northern Neck Electric

[Northern Neck Electric Cooperative](#) promoted Ryan Barrack to manager of information technology.



Ryan will be responsible for spearheading NNEC's efforts to streamline information systems operations and the protection of the co-op's cybersecurity.

In his position as IT specialist, Ryan has been instrumental in maintaining and improving NNEC's information systems, which are critical to the mission of the co-op. Throughout the last year, he played a key role in moving NNEC's workforce to more virtual platforms allowing work-from-home for an essential industry.

Ryan brings with him 16 years of experience in information systems management, of which nearly four were with NNEC. He holds an associate degree in computer electronics engineering technology from ECPI Technical College.

Ryan is also a firefighter at Upper Lancaster Volunteer Fire Department and a deacon at Rappahannock Church of Christ. He is a native of Robley, Va. He and his wife, Lauren, have a son, Graysen, and reside in Lancaster, Va.

– Report by Kyle Allwine, Public Affairs Manager, Northern Neck Electric Cooperative.



## Francis Elected to Serve on Statewide VCC Board

Recently, leaders from cooperatives across Virginia took part in the 59th Annual Meeting of the [Virginia Cooperative Council](#), which was held virtually. During the business portion of the meeting, members elected Dustin Francis, community relations coordinator for Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative, to serve a three-year term on the VCC Board of Directors. VCC's mission is to promote the understanding and appreciation of farmer- and consumer-owned cooperative businesses across the commonwealth, and their contributions to the state economy through youth and adult education. Formerly known as the Virginia Council of Farmer Cooperatives, this not-for-profit organization was formed in 1962, and is headquartered in Richmond.

One of the primary development programs the VCC sponsors is the annual Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education. This youth leadership conference is held each spring at Graves Mountain Lodge in Syria, Va., and educates youths between the ages of 16 and 19 on cooperative business principles and management plans. This three-day workshop includes live business simulations, as well as, opportunities to enhance teamwork, leadership and communication skills, all while having the opportunity to receive up to \$2,000 in educational scholarships.

Dustin, a Halifax County resident, began his career with MEC in 2018 and served in an interim position with the VCC board since March 2020, before being elected to his current term. His current and past experiences with local 4-H and Future Farmers of America chapters and agricultural-based groups contributed to his election to the board.



Regarding his opportunity to serve, Dustin states, "The cooperative business model is genuinely unique and represents the opportunity of community members to collectively provide a solution that is most often impractical and unaffordable for individuals, areas or even entire regions. Introducing youth to the cooperative business model ensures seemingly impossible opportunities for rural areas can be accomplished by combining resources to meet previously unmet needs just like electricity decades ago or high speed internet for today."

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

## Legislative Update

On April 19, VMDAEC staff participated in NRECA's 2021 Legislative Conference on behalf of your cooperative. Though this year's conference was conducted virtually, there were many familiar elements and programs that made the conference a valuable opportunity for engagement with elected officials at the federal level. Legislative Conference began with virtual briefings from NRECA policy staff on key legislative issues in preparation for legislative meetings with members of Congress.

The key issues discussed included support for the [Flexible Financing for Rural America Act](#), which allows for the repricing of electric cooperative loans from the USDA's Rural Utility Service. NRECA staff also encouraged co-ops to advocate for grant and loan programs for rural broadband, and access to directly pay tax incentives that promote affordable and reliable electricity and renewable energy projects. NRECA staff also provided a briefing on how best to share the electric cooperative perspective on a lower-carbon future by focusing on reasonable, attainable carbon reduction goals with a focus on reliability and affordability for members.

Following the virtual briefings, co-ops were encouraged to meet with members of their Congressional delegation to advocate for these key policy issues. VMDAEC Public Affairs staff assisted our member cooperatives in setting up meetings and were pleased to receive reports of productive conversations with elected officials and staff.

For more information about the 2021 Legislative Conference, please reach out to your cooperative's government affairs staff.

– Report by Andrew Vehorn, Vice President, Member and Public Affairs, VMD Association.

## VMDAEC Welcomes New Financial Analyst



Earlier this month, the VMD Association welcomed Deon Avery as its new financial analyst. Born in Brevard, N.C., a little town outside of historic Asheville, Deon was raised by her grandparents and learned at a young age the value of hard work and responsibility.

A firm believer that preparation is the key to success, Deon recently obtained her MBA from Averett University and will soon work toward CPA certification. She has worked in the field of accounting for over 20 years, with over 10 years in a management capacity. A current resident of Chesterfield County, Va., she enjoys spending time with family. Her greatest source of joy are her three daughters, Kierra, Tiffany and Jordan and her 1-year-old grandson Kameron.

