J. Douglas Webb Left Legacy to VEC

by Phyllis Shanley

J. Douglas Webb

Maplewood Dairy Farm’s 800 acres blanket a good portion of Buck Hollow and its surrounding hills north of Fairfax. Predictably, a 300-head dairy herd near the old brick farm house is well fed on 260 acres of meadow land. Most of the land holdings, however, support a prosperous maple sugar grove. With 22,000 taps, the Farm is one of the largest producers of maple syrup in northern Vermont. From the little cemetery up behind the house, newly hayed fields look odd in pale yellow against a dark green landscape, saddened by a rain-laden overcast. The Farm’s last patriarch of the mid-20th Century died in June this year at 86.

J. Douglas Webb was a strong, positive organizer who loved to “help people help themselves,” beginning with Vermont farmers. He took on leadership roles in agricultural organizations with names like the Milton Co-op Dairy, Milk Promotion Services, Unit- ed Dairy Industry Association, and Franklin County Maple Sugar Producers Co-op. He was invaluable as a Fairfax Town Selectman and still found time to be a Fairfax Union School Board member in the 1950’s. His decision to move to Vermont in 1946, Doug and Bill got electricity to the Farm with the help of the fledgling Vermont Electric Co-op and the Rural Electrification Administration (REA). At that time, less than 10% of rural Vermont had access to electricity. Farmers wanted it badly to ease their workload in barns and milking parlors. Service from VEC was still unreliable and voltage was low at tail ends of lines. Within seven years, Doug Webb was elected to the VEC Board of Directors to represent District 6 and to see if he could help do something about continuity of service.

The Board members were almost all dairy farmers of like mind. The service had to be improved. In 1948 they hired Walter Cook to manage the Co-op’s infrastructure. Cook was a civil engineer who had run power and communications lines in wartime Boston harbor for the Army before he came to Vermont and planted roots. He and Doug Webb hit it off immediately when they met in 1952.

Together, Cook, Webb and a dedicated Board not only improved continuity of service by clearing trees and rebuilding lines, but, by 1980, they had expanded rural service to 30,000 Vermonters. All the Directors were encouraged to attend annual meetings of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) and to bring their wives along. All the Directors also understood the importance of their own wives. If the power failed while they were out working, it was their wives who answered the complaints of members in their districts. To the dismay of some members, travel expenses to St. Louis, San Francisco, Anaheim, etc., were paid by Webb. Webb believed that “any money spent in the learning process is money well spent” to improve the effectiveness of VEC management.

During President Webb’s tenure, 1973 to 1984, five women were active Board members – unusual at that time. For 12 years Laura L. D. Howe commuted to meetings from Jamaica in southern Vermont to serve as Director and Clerk of the Board.

“A strong, efficiently operated entity” was Doug Webb’s description of VEC at the 1977 Annual Meeting. In fact, at the next NRECA Annual Meeting, the Co-op was recognized for the way it conducted herbicide spraying and for its 1976 Annual Report, the best among 300 entries.

VEC had come of age, from its infancy in the arms of the REA, through its rapid growth, to an energetic player in the electric power industry.

The All Electric Dream Home

In 1973 when Doug Webb was elected President of the Board, the all-electric house was the modern dream. Walter Cook answered worried environmentalists with his long-range vision of new suburban homes with labor-saving devices – and heat – running on electricity, the cleaner energy. “Can we control the pollution of the environment at the electric generating plant more readily than at the individual home or business?” His answer then was “yes.”

In 1975, Webb said of the trustees, “Our policy throughout the years has been to replace, repair, and build lines while low-interest money was in plentiful supply. The wisdom of that policy is proven by inflation and tripling of interest rates. The future holds additional challenges: to become less dependent on expensive, outside suppliers of power by owning or generating more of our own, and to hold rates in line.” VEC was becoming more than lines and poles.

At the NRECA meeting in 1976, the major speakers agreed that an energy crisis existed in the US but...
“The Inside Scoop”

Employee Evolution

by Sally Lumbra, Human Resource & Risk Management Supervisor

SYSTEM OPERATIONS

VEC is pleased to announce that Thomas Carter joined VEC as Manager of System Operations May 19, 2008. Tom is responsible for directing and managing all day-to-day aspects of VEC’s 24/7 System Operations. Working closely with all VEC management, Tom is expected to be a positive leader and role model for the Cooperative.

Over the past 25 years Tom worked for Burlington Electric Department in increasingly responsible positions from Substation/Breaker Maintenance to Power System Coordinator. Each position has given him an opportunity to gain knowledge, experience and an overall view of the industry and how it functions as a reliable, safe and interdependent whole.

SUBSTATION

One of VEC’s newest Operations initiatives is the creation of a Substation Crew. Rhett Larose, Master Electrician, has accepted the Group Leader position. Rhett’s work ethic, desire for excellence, and proven problem solving capabilities are strengths that he has built his reputation around. Rhett has been VEC’s Master Electrician for more than 19 years. Through his own development and scope of his daily activities he has provided VEC with so much more than Master Electrician skills and he will model those same attributes for the less senior members of his crew.

Under the direction of the Chief Operating Officer, Rhett will lead, monitor, and resolve issues within this area. Rhett’s determination to continually learn and apply technical advancements are one of his greatest assets and are shared other members of his crew.

Joining the substation crew from within VEC is Bill Rouse. Bill came to VEC from the Village of Rouses Point, NY where he spent four years working at that municipal utility. Bill also has an AAS degree in Electronics Technology. While at the Village of Rouses Point, Bill gained substantial knowledge pertaining to substations and distribution facilities. As a member of the substation crew, Bill is looking forward to the challenge of proficient maintenance of substation equipment, metering, re-closer controls, intelligent electronic devices, and SCADA.

Chris Rodger is the most recent addition to VEC’s Substa- tion Crew as of July 2nd. Upon obtaining a degree in Electrical Engineering Technology from Vermont Technical College (VTC), Chris joined the Vermont Army National Guard and was deployed to Iraq in 2005 with Operation Enduring Freedom. Following his return he worked for Unitel Energy Systems in Concord, New Hampshire as a Meter Mechanic II where he worked on many different metering projects, including Automated Meter Information (AMI). In 2007 he was offered the position of Line Technician Apprentice where he assisted 1st Class Lineworkers in constructing, maintaining, and repairing overhead and underground distribution systems. Chris tested and verified SCADA controls and relays, he also did trouble shooting and maintenance on all substation AMI devices.

CONSTRUCTION

Bringing over 30 years of utility experience, 27 of those spent as a lineworker, Douglass Haselton has been appointed as Construction Manager. This newly created position is responsible for providing direct and indirect day to day supervision for all of VEC’s construction work including; scheduling, construction, maintenance, repair and service, as well as management of external resources for line and substation construction projects. Doug is expected to lead in a manner that ensures a safe working environment, safe operation, and production efficiency. Over the past two years Doug has taken on progressively more responsible roles and has shown his commitment to VEC and its members. Doug stepped into the leadership position enthusiastically and we are confident he will do well in his new role.

FINANCE

Lindsey Lemaillier was hired to work in the Finance area throughout the summer to assist with VEC’s Patroonage Capital Project. The project entails allocating equity to the membership and is made up of both line and extension portions. Lindsey’s work will enable the Finance area to meet one of their Strategic Planning objectives for Equity Management. She is attending Johnson State College as a Business Management major and has just completed her sophomore year. Lindsey’s time spent at VEC is an Internship in Company Finance.

“Oh, what a picturesque picture, what a lovely picture it is,”


Alvin Warner Retires

by Phyllis Shalaney

At the Board of Director’s meeting on May 27th, Alvin Warner announced his retirement after 30 years of service to VEC. Mr. Warner is known for his firm stand supporting hydro-electric power generation. The small-scale plant he built on his own property in the 1960’s is still going strong and will likely be his source of heat this winter. For more about Alvin Warner, see our winter 2008 edition of Co-op Life, available on our website at vermontelelectriccoop.cooplife.htm.

The remainder of Mr. Warner’s term will be served by his daughter Priscilla Merten. Ms. Merten is the comptroller for the Lamouille Family Center in Morrisville. She brought her financial skills to Meals on Wheels during its transition to in-house meal preparation, helping to rescue the program by raising funds, writing grants and looking after the organization’s restructuring. She looks forward to the coming year on the VEC Board.

Spotlight on Director: Mark Woodward, District 7

Mark Woodward is calm, organized, and easy to like. He doesn’t hesitate to speak his mind, but listens well and supports his arguments with fact.

Sitting in his verdant, sunny doorway, we bring up the nostalgia many of us have for the old railroad. Mark points out that the economic promise of the St. Johns- bard and Lamoille County Railroad didn’t happen and hundreds of farms were lost because of their investment in bonds to build it. Mark would gladly have supported a commuter train if the route went to Burlington. Instead he supports the new Rail Trail from St. Johnsbury to Johnson, via Johnson and Cam- bridge. He sees economic promise in bicycle touring.

He throws a frisbee for his bor- der collie Sarah and tells us about the beautification projects for the village of Johnson. Sidewalks and bicycle lanes are in the plan along with better parking and traffic control. It’s plain that he loves his life in Johnson.

Twenty years ago he bought an aban- doned 100 acre farm on Ben Ober Hill Road and built a house on the remains of the barn. One of his diverse occupations is to clear out estates, four or five each year, and hold a big barn sale in the village at the end of August.

A tour of the house reveals the treas- ures he has found -- a solid, oversized front door, dark with age and patina; a tall secretary desk beside his computer, complete with relics behind leaded glass doors; a tried old store counter with a row of ancient matching cutting boards for a kitchen work surface. In contrast, the stairway to bedrooms is made with new golden lumber and windows to welcome in the sunlight.

This is his permanent home. The gardens are a natural looking part of the landscape, as easy to like as he is. There is the usual barn/shed and rusted equipment hiding in the trees, but none of it looks abandoned. Clearing other people’s clutter has taught him to be wary of “stuff”.

Renewed Cooperative Effort

As a Director, Mark Woodward’s goal is to “elevate the status of cooperative principles.” His vision is to use the Internet to encourage communication with members via e-mail and perhaps a blog or other on-line exchange. Like many country dwellers in this post-industrial era, he embraces 21st Century technology while honoring the lessons and traditions of the past.

Mark finds the Internet stimulating, if addictive, and marvels at its scope. As a VEC Director one of Mark’s first tasks was to go on a rideout of VEC’s territory with Dave Hallquist, CEO. It just so hap- pened this was scheduled during the June storm that hit many areas of our territory causing outages that lasted for over three days. He watched our new Automated Meter Information (AMI) tracking system mapped outages one after another as members lost power.

He fully supports the use of VEC’s infrastructure for high-speed internet access. The AMI system communicates on higher frequencies along the power line, but optical fiber lines are already on our poles and VEC headquarters in Johnson use a tiny piece of it. Mark wants the rest to be used by under-served Vermonters. Vermont is way behind in rural telecommunications, he thinks --
Changes are Paying Off

Power Supply

The loss of Vermont Yankee this summer shows just how vulnerable VEC members and Vermont ratepayers are due to the lack of generation within the state. This incident and the string of recent problems at Vermont Yankee come at a bad time, as the question of providing a license to extend the operation for twenty years is in front of Vermont Legislature.

As of this writing, the facility is operating at 34 percent. VEC relies on Vermont Yankee for ten megawatts (MW). VEC was only receiving five megawatts with the present reduced output of the facility. This means we were filling the shortfall with market purchases. The market prices are about twice the contract price, which results in a loss for VEC ratepayers.

Clearly, this demonstrates how important it is to develop new generation sources in Vermont. Electricity costs are soaring along with the oil costs, which is why VEC is working on every possible generation project that comes up in the state. We are currently in discussion with three wind projects within the VEC territory, two large bio-mass projects, one bio-fuel peaking facility, and a variety of smaller wind and bio-mass projects. VEC hopes to close on several of these in the near future, however, the project schedules are long and there simply aren’t enough of them. Meanwhile, VEC’s Power Supply group has done an excellent job of securing longer-term contracts.

Our energy costs drive the economy and the economic well being of our members. I urge all VEC members to keep energy on the top of your list of concerns, both at the personal level, as well as at the local and national level. Take the time to understand the positions of your elected officials on energy policy and become active. VEC is your co-operative. Include consideration of getting involved at the VEC board level, including running for a VEC board seat.

Northlink Project

VEC has been working in partnership with Northlink to put up 400 miles of fiber throughout Northern Vermont. This collaboration helps move broadband into rural areas of Vermont that are not served today, as well as providing VEC reliable telecommunications to 24 of its substations.

The project is highly innovative and has been slowed by a number of policy and legal issues. I am happy to say that we now have agreements in all areas, as well as a positive Vermont Supreme Court decision (a number of landowners had challenged VELCO's use of fiber). Fairpoint's acquisition of Verizon also helped move the project along. Fairpoint is clearly committed to working collaboratively with VEC to help with the broadband effort.

VEC is getting ready to "light" the fiber to its Newport Center, Derby, and West Charleston substations. The next leg of this fiber will be from Newport to the VEC Johnson office, following Route 100.

Changes are Paying Off

The VEC Board of Directors, management team, and VEC employees have been working hard to implement the recommendations of the Business Process Review and Audit, as well as our Strategic Plan. We are now getting feedback from our members, as well as our regulators, that the improvements are working.

While I am reluctant to be too optimistic about the improvements, there is significant work to be done, VEC is getting a lot of positive feedback from its members and the number of complaints has dropped significantly. Our recent member survey shows overall increased member satisfaction in almost all areas.

Much important work is being done in the areas of Vegetation Management and system improvements. VEC has been in the process of doubling its vegetation management budget, and will double the improvement side of its capital budget starting next year. VEC has put together a 10-year capital improvement plan, which will be posted on the website in August. Although, it will take a few years before all members benefit we are excited to be moving in the right direction.

VEC is happy to say that we have taken a few minutes to visit the VEC website (www.vermontelectric.coop) and review the work being done by VEC’s hard working employees.

Construction Corner

by Harry Abendroth, Mgr. Regulatory & Planning Engineering

Not far from its origins in 1938, Vermont Electric Cooperative (VEC) began work on July 14th to refurbish its Eden Substation. Transformers, isolators and other components, some dating from the 1950’s, will be replaced. The new transformers are environmentally friendly, using biodegradable oil in place of petroleum-based mineral oil. The Eden Substation is the first VEC substation to have all transformers within a single facility utilizing biodegradable oil.

In an effort to minimize member impact from the work at Eden Substation, a portable substation was rented from Green Mountain Power Corporation. Use of this mobile substation allowed work to proceed without interrupting service to our members in the Eden area.

Upgrading of our distribution lines continues in the Coventry area to connect another farm methane generating facility to VEC’s system. VEC will purchase all of the power produced from the facility which is expected to be around 225 kW.

Construction will be completed this summer on eight miles of distribution line along Route 14 in Albany and Irasburg. This upgrade is an important step in consolidating the legacy Citizens and VEC distribution lines in the towns of Albany, Craftsbury and Irasburg into a single, more efficiently operated distribution system. These types of projects are much needed in many areas within VEC’s service territory. Anyone interested in learning more about VEC’s future upgrade plans can find our Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) on the website at: www.vermontelectric.coop. The IRP describes VEC’s upgrade philosophies and ten year capital plan.

Visit us on the web at: www.vermontelectric.coop

CEO CORNER

Power Supply  Northlink Project  Changes are Paying Off

Safety Tips for Safe Portable Generator Use

by Margaret Fullerton, Safety & Compliance Manager

The reasonable cost and availability of portable generators has resulted in an increase in home ownership. Many homeowners think of generators as just another home appliance, like a refrigerator, or TV, and likewise believe that generators are as safe as other household appliances. Installed and used properly, generators offer great benefits when the power goes out. However, installed and used improperly, they could be deadly to you and others.

The only safe way to connect a portable generator to your existing wiring is to have a licensed electrical contractor install a transfer switch. If the generator is connected directly to your home's wiring without the transfer switch, it can “backfeed” into the power line connected to your home. Utility transformers can increase this backfeed to thousands of volts which could result in serious injury or even death to a utility lineman making repairs to the line. The transfer switch must disconnect the utility power lines from your generator before any use. Vermont Electric Coop encourages the safe use of generators and requests that you adhere to the following tips regarding safe generator usage.

• Only purchase a generator that is listed with Underwriter's Laborato- ry (UL) or Factory Mutual (FM).
• Follow the directions provided with the generator.
• Never use a generator indoors, including inside a garage.
• Be sure there is adequate ventilation.
• Follow proper refueling practices such as: always let the generator cool down before refueling and use the type of fuel recommended by the manufacturer.
• Always store gasoline and other flammable liquids outside of living areas.
• Install carbon monoxide detectors in your home as they will warn you of any CO gas from the generator that could enter your home as a result of improper generator installation.
• Plug individual appliances into the generator using heavy-duty, outdoor rated cords with a wire gauge adequate for the appliance load.
• Refer to your generator manufacturer's manual for correct ground- ing procedures.
• Turn off all equipment powered by the generator before shutting down the generator.
• Always use care during operation and keep children away from portable generators at all times. Many generator parts are hot and could result in burns.

The VEC Board of Directors, management team, and VEC employees have been working hard to implement the recommendations of the Business Process Review and Audit, as well as our Strategic Plan. We are now getting feedback from our members, as well as our regulators, that the improvements are working.

While I am reluctant to be too optimistic about the improvements, there is significant work to be done, VEC is getting a lot of positive feedback from its members and the number of complaints has dropped significantly. Our recent member survey shows overall increased member satisfaction in almost all areas.

Much important work is being done in the areas of Vegetation Management and system improvements. VEC has been in the process of doubling its vegetation management budget, and will double the improvement side of its capital budget starting next year. VEC has put together a 10-year capital improvement plan, which will be posted on the website in August. Although, it will take a few years before all members benefit we are excited to be moving in the right direction.

VEC is happy to say that we have taken a few minutes to visit the VEC website (www.vermontelectric.coop) and review the work being done by VEC’s hard working employees.
that "we are going to overcome it." One speaker, scientist Mike McCormack of Washington, was sure that nuclear energy would be the main source of energy developed for the next 20 or 30 years.

Long time fan and champion of VEC, Senator George Aiken, attended every annual meeting but one since 1938 when he personally threw the switch to energize our lines for the first time. In 1977, he too supported nuclear power, saying, "We're surrounded by power, and nuclear is still the safest and cheapest.

Hydro power also had its proponents and VEC was keen to develop the Hartland Dam on the Connecticut River. Webb foresaw the price rises ahead and the threat of another energy crisis like the one in 1973. Though VEC rates were still competitive in 1983, the Co-op would face a substantial increase when the North Hartland hydro station came on line. But, he said, "We are building North Hartland as part of a long-range power plan which will give us the lowest possible rates over the next 50 years."

**Electrical Co-ops Succeed**

As VEC membership grew, participation shrank. In September 1984, at the end of the Webb/Cook regime, only 22% of members voted by ballot. But, he said, "We are building North Hartland as part of a long-range power plan which will give us the lowest possible rates over the next 50 years."

**WEBB, cont. from pg. 1**

18 members, "It's great to see you all here at the 45th Annual Meeting, but this is what voting by mail does to Annual Meeting." Webb missed the large, interactive annual meetings where members asked their questions, voiced their opinions, voted by voice or show of hands, and generally kept their managers and representatives on their toes.

"A cooperative means cooperation, dedication, participation," Webb said at the 1977 Annual Meeting. He urged members to keep in touch with their directors. "No way do they know all of the problems you might have unless you tell them. Through understanding we can try to resolve them."

Schooled and sensitized by the national meetings of NRECA, Webb was a firm believer in the power of the cooperative. "Rural electrification ... serves a firm believer in the power of the co-operative. "Rural electrification ... serves..."

\[to\] have a reasonable source of energy as cheap as possible and still run a good organization. ... We have a great divergence of opinion on your board right now. And that's good. I hope it stays that way."

Did it really mean that? After years of cooperative effort among the Board members, factions developed primarily over the financing of nuclear power. In 1979, after 30 years of hard work, Walter Cook stepped down and an energetic young accountant named Bill Gallagher stepped up. In 1984, Webb and his supporters on the Board were deposed by new-comer Bob Northrop and his followers.

"45 years of stewardship" was the theme of the 1983 annual report. "For it is as stewards of this institution that we have had to make the tough decisions which benefit us all long-range," Webb said. "Many times ... we could have made short-term decisions which would have been popular and, for a short while, kept our rates lower. ... Instead we followed the course that took courage, imagination, and prudence. That, in my opinion, is the heart of stewardship."

In 1984, J. Douglas Webb received the Distinguished Service Award from the Northeast Public Power Association (NPRA) for having served on a consumer-owned utility board more than 30 years and having made significant contributions to public power.

We asked Walter Cook, now 94 and living on the edge of Lake Elmore, why he was smiling in most of his pictures in the Co-op Life archives. "I was happy," he said. "I had a wonderful job; I had a wonderful boss, I had wonderful Directors." Looking out his window in a moment of reflection, he said, "Douglas was a hell of a fine, fine, fine guy."

**WOODWARD, cont. from pg. 2**

about where VEC's electric service was 60 years ago.

Where VEC had help from the Rural Electrification Act (REA), telecommunication service is dependent on business climate. It's difficult to find a provider willing to take on a rural market. Mark envisions localized community-owned services as the solution. He too pleased to note that Johnson is the first to learn more about Home Performance with ENERGY STAR. A Home Performance with ENERGY STAR® certified contractor can help assess the situation and make recommendations. Call Efficiency Vermont toll-free: 888-921-5990 to speak with a customer service representative.

Q: When we reopened our camp house in the spring, we started wondering if we'd been wasting electricity over the winter by keeping our electric water heater and fridge running. Can you tell me how to safely lower the energy the camp uses after we close it in the fall?

**Efficiency Vermont**

A: Absolutely. In fact, if you're willing to make some careful preparations, you can do more than lower your empty camp's energy use; you can eliminate it. It's a matter of winterizing the entire house, including the water heater, and carefully following proper methods to drain any device that uses water. I strongly recommend finding a trusted contractor in the area to complete this for you, as mistakes could lead to burst pipes, cracked toilets or busted water heaters. Prepping the refrigerator is simple. Empty and clean the fridge, unplug it and prop the door open to prevent smells from developing. When all this is done, turn off the main power at the breaker box, and head home knowing that you've properly tucked your camp for its winter hibernation.

Q: An electrician doing rewiring found wet fiberglass insulation between appliances. Would you take care of this right away. Wet insulation doesn't insulate, so you're wasting energy. Moisture accumulation also can cause unhealthy mold and will eventually rot building materials. Find out where the water came from, fix the cause, and then replace the wet insulation and any rotted material. A Home Performance with ENERGY STAR® certified contractor can best assess the situation and make recommendations. Call Efficiency Vermont to learn more about Home Performance with ENERGY STAR. I

To find more energy saving tips or to submit a new question about energy use in your home or business, visit www.efficiencyvermont.com/askrahael or call, toll-free: 888-921-5990 to speak with a customer service representative.

Q: How critical is it that I replace this?

A: You should take care of this right away. Wet insulation doesn't insulate, so you're wasting energy. Moisture accumulation also can cause unhealthy mold and will eventually rot building materials. Find out where the water came from, fix the cause, and then replace the wet insulation and any rotted material. A Home Performance with ENERGY STAR® certified contractor can best assess the situation and make recommendations. Call Efficiency Vermont to learn more about Home Performance with ENERGY STAR. I
Upcoming Winter Heating Challenges

by Randy Pratt, Manager of Government Relations

All signs are pointing to a very challenging heating season for Vermonters. This year, VEC – in conjunction with other electric utilities, Efficiency Vermont (EVT), state legislators and regulators, and several other organizations – is urging homeowners to use caution, conservation, preparation, and prevention, starting now, to lessen the risks and costs associated with electric space heating.

Be Prepared

Good planning and budgeting is more important than ever in these times of uncertainty. The convenience and availability of electric space heaters may be a tempting alternative, or at least used as a back-up. But even with gas and oil prices as high as they are now, choosing electric space heat is still likely to be a more expensive alternative.

“Even with higher oil and gas prices, electricity remains the most expensive way to heat a home,” says Blair Hamilton of Efficiency Vermont. “Although small in size, if a thermostatically controlled 1.5kW electric space heater is used under normal indoor conditions, it would cycle on about 1/3 of the time, and could increase energy costs by as much as $50 per month. Not only can the excessive use of electric heat cost individual users more in the short term, but if enough people use more electricity, particularly during peak times, it can end up costing everyone more, through higher rates, over the long term.

To aid in preparing for the upcoming heating season, the state’s Department of Public Service, Vermont 2-1-1, and Efficiency Vermont have activated the long term.

Everyone more, through higher rates, over peak” times, it can end up costing ev-

Electric space heating use.

The success of these innovative systems depends upon the accuracy of VEC’s member information database and we need your help to make it work for YOU!

Please contact our Member Service Department to confirm your service location address and telephone number at 1-800-832-2667 or 802-635-2331. If you prefer you can email us at: support@vermontelectric.coop. Be sure to include your service location address and telephone number in your email.

We appreciate your help so we can serve you better!
VEC Leads State in Implementing Automated Meter Information System

by Kathryn Kantorski, Manager of Communications & Business Development

VEC is a leader in Vermont when it comes to implementing the technology of an Automated Meter Information (AMI) system. VEC first announced its intentions of implementing an AMI system in December of 2004. By October of 2005, VEC started reading the AMI meters for the first group of members located in the Islands (Grand Isle, Alburgh, North and South Hero). While other utilities in Vermont are currently exploring what options of AMI technology are available and make sense for them, VEC has over 22,000 AMI meters (two-thirds of the planned 33,000) already installed and communicating for billing and outage information purposes. “This truly sets us apart as a leader of this technology in the state,” said Hallquist, Co-op President. “We are very proud of VEC’s progress and the benefits it provides our members,” added Hallquist.

AMI systems provide many benefits to both the utility and the member. AMI reduces the need for meter readers to manually gather utility meter readings; it improves member service by providing hourly usage data which can be used to help members reduce cost of their power and identify possible problems with their power usage; it reduces the number of misreads due to human error; and it provides timely outage information during severe inclement weather. AMI also integrates with our Outage Management System (OMS) to automatically report power outages. In areas connected to AMI, the information from the meters is monitored in the Systems Operations Area regularly. Often the system operators are aware of an outage before the member even calls.

VEC strives to provide the best possible member service, high reliability and low rates. The implementation of AMI technology will help the Cooperative to realize these goals.

VEC Leads State in Implementing Automated Meter Information System

Ongoing Investments for Future Benefits

VEC expects to seek a rate increase by the end of 2008. The revenue from higher rates will be used primarily to fund additional utility infrastructure improvements (such as substation upgrades, poles and wires), as well as to pay for increased transmission costs. The requested increase is the culmination of an effort that began in early 2007 to evaluate VEC’s business processes. An increase in our rates will help us to provide improved reliability to our membership.

In 2007, VEC along with the Vermont Department of Public Service, (VDPS) contracted with Shaw Stone & Webster Management Consultants, Inc. to perform a comprehensive Business Process Review and Audit (Bبرا). The independent study was performed to evaluate VEC’s business processes and to make recommendations to improve the operation of the utility. The study began on March 30, 2007, and was completed on December 24, 2007. The Bبرا includes a number of recommendations. On February 12, 2008, VEC filed an implementation plan for completing the Bبرا-recommended actions. While some of the recommendations were completed during the audit period; others will take as long as ten years to implement.

One of the more significant recommendations was that VEC conduct a system-wide assessment of its existing utility plant infrastructure. The system assessment is needed to determine a recommended level of investment in the infrastructure and to prioritize the infrastructure investment to improve service, safety, and reliability. The assessment was completed in June, 2008, and was incorporated into VEC’s Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) that was filed with the Vermont Public Service Board on July 1, 2008. The IRP provides a formal plan for VEC’s power supply strategy and infrastructure investment over the next ten years. Both the assessment and IRP include a need for incremental capital investment in VEC’s system of over $32 million. Beginning in 2009, for the first few years during the initial phase of the investment, the incremental increases will be $3.6 million/year.

Our infrastructure is in significant need of critical work to maintain and improve reliability and safety. However, we are planning on phasing in the infrastructure investment over ten years to avoid significant rate impacts on our membership. Previously we have increased the level of our vegetation maintenance spending by 120 percent over a four year period (2006-2009) without negatively impacting rates. We believe the combination of the efforts on vegetation maintenance and increased utility infrastructure investment will directly improve reliability and safety.

VEC’s current annual baseline capital investment is about $6 million per year. The increase of $3.6 million annually represents a 60 percent increase over current spending levels on utility infrastructure. The increased capital investment will come from a balance of new debt and equity (rates). We expect approximately 40 percent of the incremental investment will need to come from an increase in our rates. The remaining balance will be funded through the use of long term debt.

The second major contributor of our rate request will be for transmission costs. Over 70 percent of VEC’s costs are for power supply and transmission and it is projected they will increase by about 28 percent in 2009 and an additional 20 percent in 2010. Before this becomes a reality, and we will keep you posted.

VEC's Fuel Assistance Program helps low-income Vermonters pay for a part of their winter home heating bills. If you believe you may qualify for our program, you can apply for the Fuel Assistance Program, VEC encourages you to apply for the program by the end of August to receive the maximum benefits. To get an application, call the Fuel Office at 1-800-470-6151, or pick one up at a local office of the Department of PATH (Prevention, Assistance, Transition and Health Access). Community Action Agency or Agency on Aging.

Together, and with preparation, WINTER, cont. from pg. 5

VEC's Fuel Assistance Program helps low-income Vermonters pay for a part of their winter home heating bills. If you believe you may qualify for our program, you can apply for the program by the end of August to receive the maximum benefits. To get an application, call the Fuel Office at 1-800-470-6151, or pick one up at a local office of the Department of PATH (Prevention, Assistance, Transition and Health Access). Community Action Agency or Agency on Aging.
Summer Storms Wreak Havoc with VEC’s System

by Kathryn Kantorski, Manager of Communications & Business Development

Several recent storms remind one of the challenges faced in a rural state like Vermont when it comes to keeping the lights on. Powerful storm systems characterized by lightning, thunder and high winds, have ripped through Vermont Electric Cooperative (VEC) territory several times in the past few months. These events caused serious damage to VEC’s infrastructure and resulted in the loss of power for thousands of members.

In June, two back to back afternoon storms left more than 30 percent of VEC members without power, as high winds and lightning swept through northern Vermont. Within thirty minutes of the first wave of storms, more than 5,000 members lost power. Four hours into restoration efforts, a second and more powerful storm hammered the region again leaving upwards of 10,000 VEC members in the dark. By daybreak, power was restored to the majority of members, yet damage was extensive enough to leave nearly 3,000 of VEC’s 34,000 members without power for more than 24 hours.

Five weeks later when all appeared calm, another series of storms ripped through VEC’s territory uprooting trees, downing power lines, breaking poles and leaving approximately 8,800 members without power. Hardest hit areas included Isle La Motte, Cambridge, Waterville and Fletcher. Within 24 hours, power had been restored to more than 6,700 members and within 48 hours nearly all members had regained their electric service.

During this July storm, crews began working immediately after the storm hit on Friday afternoon and continued through Saturday evening before heading home to rest. In fact, most had been working since early Friday morning when their normal shift began. “VEC has some of the most dedicated employees I have ever had the experience of working with,” said Jeffery Wright, chief operating officer. “In fact, four linemen who were on scheduled vacation time were called in to help and accepted the call with no questions asked,” added Wright.

In order to minimize the duration of these types of outages, VEC employees are prepared to start restoration efforts as soon as a storm hits, but planning for storm recovery begins well in advance. VEC’s state of the art operations and dispatch center monitor weather conditions continuously to identify storm threats as they develop. In some cases, pending weather events are identified days in advance, but other times Mother Nature strikes without much warning.

When significant outages occur, VEC employees are called upon immediately to provide 24-hour/day support during the recovery effort. Line workers repair downed lines and broken utility poles working day and night, often in weather conditions that are less than ideal. However, not all of the action takes place in the front lines. Back at VEC headquarters in Johnson, member service representatives and other office personnel work round the clock to answer member calls and report outages to the system operations and dispatch center, which is the core of VEC’s operation. Engineering staff monitor the infrastructure by “bird dogging” in the field, looking for downed wires, limbs and trees on lines, open cutouts and fuses, or any sign of trouble that will assist the line workers in restoration. Information Technology (IT) staff ensure that all communications systems such as phones, the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system, and Outage Management System (OMS) are functioning properly.

Powerful storms put VEC’s resources to the test. Assessments indicate a significant and/or widespread outage, VEC may call on other Vermont utilities, as well as contract crews, to provide additional assistance. In the spirit of mutual aid and cooperation, VEC reciprocates this type of support when the tables are turned.

For example, following the June 10th storm, VEC forces more than doubled when thirteen line crews from other companies including Johnson Village, Morrisville Electric, Swanton Village, Central Vermont Public Service (CVPS), New Hampshire Electric Coop, Bemis Line Construction and Energized Line Construction joined VEC crews to work safely and quickly to restore service as soon as possible.

Public safety and prompt restoration of power are top priorities and during a significant outage, VEC does not work alone. Vermont Emergency Management, the American Red Cross and local emergency response teams communicate regularly with VEC and other utility companies to determine what resources are needed to keep Vermonters safe. This includes the coordination of emergency evacuation sites and food supplies if necessary.

Changing weather patterns have presented VEC with an unusually high number of major storm events this year, underscoring the importance of the work that’s done most days when employees are not dealing with emergency situations. Maintaining and improving system infrastructure and tree trimming are examples of ongoing work that helps to minimize the impact when storms hit.

Dedicated VEC employees will jump to action when the next storm event happens. “We understand that the impact of an outage can range from a minor inconvenience to a life-threatening situation for some members,” said Liz Gamache, manager of corporate services. “VEC is committed to our members. When the power is out, rest assured that a team of dedicated employees is working hard to get the lights back on.”

During this July storm, crews began working immediately after the storm hit on Friday afternoon and continued through Saturday evening before heading home to rest. In fact, most had been working since early Friday morning when their normal shift began. “VEC has some of the most dedicated employees I have ever had the experience of working with,” said Jeffery Wright, chief operating officer. “In fact, four linemen who were on scheduled vacation time were called in to help and accepted the call with no questions asked,” added Wright.

In order to minimize the duration of these types of outages, VEC employees are prepared to start restoration efforts as soon as a storm hits, but planning for storm recovery begins well in advance. VEC’s state of the art operations and dispatch center monitor weather conditions continuously to identify storm threats as they develop. In some cases, pending weather events are identified days in advance, but other times Mother Nature strikes without much warning.

When significant outages occur, VEC employees are called upon immediately to provide 24-hour/day support during the recovery effort. Line workers repair downed lines and broken utility poles working day and night, often in weather conditions that are less than ideal. However, not all of the action takes place in the front lines. Back at VEC headquarters in Johnson, member service representatives and other office personnel work round the clock to answer member calls and report outages to the system operations and dispatch center, which is the core of VEC’s operation. Engineering staff monitor the infrastructure by “bird dogging” in the field, looking for downed wires, limbs and trees on lines, open cutouts and fuses, or any sign of trouble that will assist the line workers in restoration. Information Technology (IT) staff ensure that all communications systems such as phones, the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system, and Outage Management System (OMS) are functioning properly.

Powerful storms put VEC’s resources to the test. Assessments indicate a significant and/or widespread outage, VEC may call on other Vermont utilities, as well as contract crews, to provide additional assistance. In the spirit of mutual aid and cooperation, VEC reciprocates this type of support when the tables are turned.

For example, following the June 10th storm, VEC forces more than doubled when thirteen line crews from other companies including Johnson Village, Morrisville Electric, Swanton Village, Central Vermont Public Service (CVPS), New Hampshire Electric Coop, Bemis Line Construction and Energized Line Construction joined VEC crews to work safely and quickly to restore service as soon as possible.

Public safety and prompt restoration of power are top priorities and during a significant outage, VEC does not work alone. Vermont Emergency Management, the American Red Cross and local emergency response teams communicate regularly with VEC and other utility companies to determine what resources are needed to keep Vermonters safe. This includes the coordination of emergency evacuation sites and food supplies if necessary.

Changing weather patterns have presented VEC with an unusually high number of major storm events this year, underscoring the importance of the work that’s done most days when employees are not dealing with emergency situations. Maintaining and improving system infrastructure and tree trimming are examples of ongoing work that helps to minimize the impact when storms hit.

Dedicated VEC employees will jump to action when the next storm event happens. “We understand that the impact of an outage can range from a minor inconvenience to a life-threatening situation for some members,” said Liz Gamache, manager of corporate services. “VEC is committed to our members. When the power is out, rest assured that a team of dedicated employees is working hard to get the lights back on.”

VECF has experienced extensive damage throughout parts of our territory as a result of several unprecedented and severe storms this spring and summer. We have taken a number of steps to improve communication with our members during outages by upgrading our phone system, integrating the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system with our Outage Management System (OMS), and making use of both the VEC website and emergency broadcast networks to provide updates. In addition, the following FM radio stations around the state have agreed to work with VEC to keep our members informed during an outage. We encourage you to keep this list on file for reference during a storm, or place it in a spot near your portable radio.

WEZF - 92.9 FM • WM00 - 92.1 FM • WLVB - 92.9 FM • WOKO - 98.6 FM
WKOL - 105.1 FM • WIZN - 106.7 FM
Summer Storms Wreak Havoc .................................................................................................... pg. 7

VEC leads in AMI ..................................................................................................................... pg. 6

VEC Rate Increase ..................................................................................................................... pg. 5

IVR ............................................................................................................................................. pg. 5

Safety Tips .................................................................................................................................. pg. 3

CEO Corner ................................................................................................................................. pg. 3

Spotlight on Director: Mark Woodward .................................................................................... pg. 2

Alvin Warner Retirement ........................................................................................................... pg. 2

“The Inside Scoop” Employee Evolution .................................................................................... pg. 2

The Webb Legacy ........................................................................................................................ pg. 1

Co-op Life

Inside Co-op Life
Summer 2008

The Webb Legacy.......................................................... pg. 1
Introducing Ed Herring.................................................. pg. 1
“The Inside Scoop” Employee Evolution....................... pg. 2
Alvin Warner Retirement .............................................. pg. 2
Spotlight on Director: Mark Woodward........................ pg. 2
CEO Corner ................................................................................................................................. pg. 3
Construction Corner ..................................................... pg. 3
Safety Tips .................................................................................................................................. pg. 3
Ask Ralph ................................................................. pg. 4
Winter Heating Challenges ........................................ pg. 5
IVR ............................................................................................................................................. pg. 5
VEC Rate Increase ...................................................... pg. 5
VEC leads in AMI ....................................................... pg. 6
Summer Storms Wreak Havoc ........................................ pg. 7

Sudden skies over Buck Hollow seem to mourn the loss of VEC legend J. Douglas Webb.

Somber skies over Buck Hollow seem to mourn the loss of VEC legend J. Douglas Webb.

Somber skies over Buck Hollow seem to mourn the loss of VEC legend J. Douglas Webb.

Somber skies over Buck Hollow seem to mourn the loss of VEC legend J. Douglas Webb.