

NOVEC *Cooperative Living*



BROADENING VIRGINIA'S HORIZONS

PAGE 10

Tad Deriso (left)
and David Hudgins
of Mid-Atlantic
Broadband
Communities
Corporation



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1100	+400	10	\$110.00	\$47.50	36%
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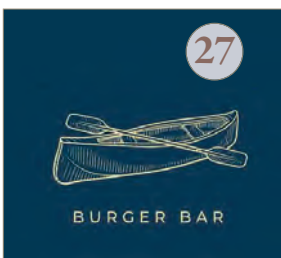
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VIEWPOINT

Celebrating Anniversaries

This is a very special year for the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives as we celebrate our 80th year in existence. In 1944 we were formed by our distribution electric cooperatives that we continue to serve today by providing



Virginia, Maryland & Delaware
Association of Electric Cooperatives

valued services that include this magazine, safety training, communication services, and governmental and regulatory support.

Our cover story this month recognizes yet another anniversary taking place this year. Mid-Atlantic Broadband Communities Corporation began paving the way for broadband deployment 20 years ago in 2004. As the article indicates, MBC was into broadband before broadband was cool. Electric cooperatives played a pivotal role in the start



of this organization that has grown into the backbone of rural high-speed internet throughout our region.

Just like electricity in the 1930s and 1940s, the only way broadband was coming to Virginia's rural areas was going to be if cooperatives stepped up to make it happen.

As we now move into spring and get more involved in outdoor activities, we are also including an article this month about someone whose passion is creating outdoor hiking trails for others to enjoy. Other features in this issue include celebrating the March holidays (St. Patrick's Day and this year, Easter), along with yet another interesting article about one of our cooperative's employees who has gone full circle from Youth Tour participant to Youth Tour chaperone.

We are honored and humbled to carry on our 80-year tradition of serving our cooperatives that provide reliable electricity safely to over 1 million homes and businesses in our three-state area. ●

Brian S. Mosier, President & CEO

Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives

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To inform you about your cooperative and its efforts to serve your energy needs; how to use electricity safely and efficiently; and the people who define and enhance the quality of life in communities served by electric co-ops.

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Please recycle.



Irish Road Bowling in Staunton, Va.

Ireland, 1803

On the Road Again

Irish Road Bowling is a St. Patrick's Day tradition



by Gregg MacDonald, Staff Writer



WANT TO TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT AND TRULY IRISH THIS ST. PATRICK'S DAY?

How about getting together with three of your closest friends and each taking turns throwing a 2-pound ball made of steel and iron down a road about a half-dozen times? In Staunton, Va., they have been doing it every St. Patrick's Day for the last decade and loving it.

It's called Irish Road Bowling and its history is as interesting as the game, which is scored pretty much like golf but played with a 28-ounce metal ball, or "bowl," thrown underhand by each player.

According to avid player John Byrer who brought the game to Staunton from West Virginia, the sport of Irish Road Bowling can be traced back to 1600s Ireland, when it was originally played with military cannon balls.

"One story is that Dutch soldiers brought the game with them when William of Orange came to Ireland in 1689," he says. "Another legend says that it started when Irish patriots robbed English cannonballs one fateful night and rolled them down a country lane by the light of a full moon."

Irish immigrants eventually brought the game to America and are believed to have played it during both the American Revolutionary and Civil War.

"Irish troops have traditionally played road bowling wherever they were stationed around the world, usually between battles," says Dave Powell of West Virginia Irish Road Bowling. "We have been playing it here since 1995, when on March 18 of that year, the first official Irish Road Bowling match since the Civil War was played in West Virginia."

Byrer left West Virginia in 2014 and moved to Staunton, bringing the game with him. He introduced it to Steve Taetzsch of Staunton Parks & Recreation Department, who began holding annual matches on St. Patrick's Day in Staunton's Montgomery Hall Park beginning in 2015.

"People love it," Taetzsch says. "They generally play in threesomes or foursomes, like golf. Some teams decorate their metal bowls with their team colors."

Players take turns standing behind a mark and throwing their bowl as far as possible down a road. Their teammates are stationed 20 to 30 yards ahead of them to note where the bowl eventually stops. If it lands on the road, that spot is marked with chalk. If the bowl lands off the road, it is brought back to the road at the same distance and marked there. The goal is to reach the 1.5-mile marker with the fewest throws.

This year's match will be held on Saturday, March 16, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Montgomery Hall Park in Staunton. •

► For more, call the Staunton Parks & Recreation office at 540-332-3945.

A Time of Porpoise

A memorable beach moment: You're basking in the warm sun, toes in the sand, letting the gentle turn of the foam-capped waves lull you into a state of complete relaxation. As your eyes scan the endless horizon of blue on blue, you're rewarded with a pod of dolphins making their way across the sea.

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Inspired to Pursue Her Dreams

Former Youth Tour delegate becomes the chaperone

by Jim Robertson, Staff Writer

For more than 50 years, high school students have congregated in the nation's capital for an inspiring week. In 2008, Katie Lockett represented Choptank Electric Cooperative as a student delegate at Youth Tour, a leadership conference for high school students in Washington, D.C. A short 15 years later, she now serves as the co-op's manager of marketing, communications and education.

Born and raised in Denton, Md., just 4 miles from Choptank Electric's headquarters, Lockett grew fond of her co-op's community involvement in local parades, food bank donation days, fairs and more, including sponsorship of her T-ball team when she was 6 years old. "My uncle was a lineman here, so I was very familiar with co-ops and Choptank Electric Cooperative," says Lockett, who was determined in high school to pursue a career with a focus on writing.

ONE MEMORABLE WEEK

"My uncle let me know about Youth Tour when I was a junior in high school and encouraged me to participate," Lockett recalls. Some of her favorite memories from that week include dinner on a Potomac River cruise, meeting elected officials on Capitol Hill, keynote addresses from motivational leaders, and making new friends from all over the U.S.

Lockett's experience continued after being selected as the Youth Leadership Council delegate for Maryland. During Youth Tour, each state selects one student as its YLC representative. She returned to NRECA's office in Arlington, Va., that summer and later attended its annual meeting in New Orleans.

I WANT YOUR JOB

After visiting with her guidance counselor about Youth Tour, Lockett met the person in the role she would later fill. Anne Whaples, who served as manager of communications at Choptank Electric and coordinated the co-op's involvement in Youth Tour.

Lockett remembers talking to Whaples after Youth Tour and saying, "I want your job. When you retire, I want to do what you do for Choptank." During her senior year at Clemson University, where she studied communications, she was notified that Whaples was retiring and the job was available. The timing wasn't meant to be — not yet, at least.



Katie Lockett today, right, and far left, posing with two other student delegates in front of the U.S. Capitol during the 2008 Youth Tour.



THE JOURNEY HOME

Lockett had a desire to leave her home state of Maryland and attend college down south, but says, "I always planned to come back home."

After gaining valuable experience with a public relations firm in South Carolina, Lockett began her journey back home and worked nearly a decade in communications roles with Maryland Farm Bureau and Horizon Farm Credit, serving rural members on the Eastern Shore.

When the communications role at Choptank Electric became available in 2022, Lockett saw her dream coming true. And it did. "It took me almost 10 years, but I finally got here," she says.

A STORYTELLER AT HEART

"My mom used to joke that I'd watch a 15-minute episode of 'Rugrats' as a kid and take 20 minutes to explain the episode back to her," Lockett recalls. "I love to tell stories and fill in details and share my perspective."

Today, she continues telling stories about her community and Choptank Electric members. Part of the cooperative difference is that co-ops are focused on people and improving quality of life. She loves the element of surprise when approaching a story with her own ideas and seeing it take a completely unexpected, and often more interesting, path during the conversation.

Lockett feels fortunate to have received the benefits of being a co-op member growing up, and now she has the ability to educate others and help them take full advantage of the resources available. Those benefits continue as an employee. "Choptank Electric has been supportive in both personal and professional development," says Lockett. "They encourage our participation in various training opportunities, seminars and webinars."

One of Lockett's short-term goals is to focus more effort in educating youth about co-ops. She looks forward to increasing her co-op's involvement with career fairs, touch-a-truck events, safety demonstrations and other community events. After all, that is what inspired her to pursue her dream. ●

► For more information, visit vmdaec.com/powerfulcareers.

Spinal Tap

How to build a strong and limber back

by Vanessa LaFaso Stolarski, Contributing Columnist

We humans typically move on a single plane of motion, forward and backward (frontal plane). But the spine can accommodate multiple angles of movement and it's important for flexibility and injury prevention that we hit them all as regularly as possible.

Twisting movements, known collectively as the “transverse” plane, are especially integral to avoiding hip and lower back pain. One way you can incorporate this into your daily routine is when standing in your kitchen. Stand between two counters with feet facing forward. Try moving dishes or other objects from one countertop to the other, turning only at the trunk.

Below are a few others to try. I recommend all my clients do a few sets of any of the following movements once in the morning and once in the evening. Choose one or two, then switch it up the following month. Always be aware of your breathing. Exhale at the point of the most tension and keep your breath steady while holding positions, in through the nose and gently out the mouth.



CAT-COW STRETCH:

1. Start on your hands and knees in a tabletop position (but on the floor, not on a tabletop). Inhale as you arch your back, dropping your belly toward the floor and pointing your nose toward the ceiling (Cow Pose).
2. Exhale as you round your spine, pulling your shoulders down and tucking your chin to your chest (Cat Pose). Repeat this flowing movement, syncing breath with motion, to enhance spinal flexibility and relieve tension.

CHILD'S POSE:

Again, begin on your hands and knees in a tabletop position on the floor. Sit back on your heels, reaching your arms forward on the floor and allowing your head to sink through your arms. Lower your chest toward the mat, extending your spine and stretching the back muscles. Hold the pose and focus on deep breathing to release tension in the spine and promote flexibility.

BRIDGE POSE:

Lie on your back with knees bent and feet hip-width apart. Press through your feet, lifting your hips toward the ceiling and squeezing your glutes/butt. Clasp your hands under your back, straightening your arms and rolling your shoulders underneath. Bridge Pose strengthens the spine, improves posture, and stretches the neck, chest and spine.

TWISTING SEATED POSE:

Sit on the floor with your legs extended in front of you. Cross one leg over the other, placing the foot flat on the floor. Twist toward the bent knee, using the opposite arm to hug the knee and the other hand behind for support. This seated twist helps improve spinal mobility and flexibility, particularly in the thoracic spine.



Perform these exercises with full attention to posture and form. Listen to your body and give it what it's asking for, even if that means backing off the stretch just a little bit. Remember to consult with a healthcare professional or fitness expert before starting any new exercise routine, especially if you have pre-existing conditions or concerns about your spine. Additionally, perform these exercises with proper form and listen to your body to avoid overexertion or injury. ●

Vanessa LaFaso Stolarski is a certified nutrition counselor, weightlifting coach, life coach and stress-management specialist.

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“If I could live
anywhere in the
world, I wouldn’t
even have to pack.
I’m already there.”

— Ralph Robertson

PHOTO COURTESY RALPH ROBERTSON

A Path Toward the Future

Southwest Virginia ‘local legend’ has built over 13 miles of trails for his community

by Linda Jilk, Cardinal News

Most folks around Giles County know Ralph Robertson. “He is a legend in this region. It seems everyone knows him or at least knows of him,” says Narrows Town Manager Terry Nicholson.

Robertson loves outdoor recreation and has seemingly done all that the area has to offer — paddling, biking,

running, hiking, climbing, fishing, hunting, caving and backcountry skiing.

He especially loves Wolf Creek Mountain, where he grew up. “When I was a boy, we stayed in these woods ... see, we didn’t have no trails back then, we just took off, we just bushwhacked,” explains Robertson in what he jokes has been referred to by outsiders as “not a

hillbilly accent, it’s a charismatic drawl.”

And so he builds trails here. For himself, and so others can experience the beauty of the picturesque Mill Creek and Mercy Branch waterfalls, the peaceful woods that connect to the Jefferson National Forest and the Appalachian Trail, the spectacular Sentinel Point overlook.

Outdoor adventurers know Giles County for the Cascades, Bald Knob, the Appalachian trail and the New River. And thanks to Robertson's trailblazing, the town of Narrows' Mill Creek Nature Park offers miles of hiking and mountain biking trails past four beautiful waterfalls and to a stunning viewpoint.

CLEARING THE WAY

Robertson, who retired from 41 years at Celanese Corp. in 2013, has cleared and created more than 13 miles of trails to access the Mill Creek/Wolf Creek Mountain wilderness in Narrows. "People say, 'Thank you for your work,'" says Robertson with a laugh. "Well, it's not work for me. It's physical and mental therapy. Because I ride my bike up, work on the trails three to four hours and ride back. I mean, I just love it. Some people love to fish, some people love to hunt; well, I just love to build trails."

"Ralph is responsible for many miles of trails in Narrows and Giles County, including most of the trails in Mill Creek Nature Park," Nicholson says. "This is exemplary of his desire to share the joy he gets from being outside with everyone. He saw a need for the trails, and so he built them. That kind of dedication to a community is hard to find."

Hikers, bikers and runners who explore the 145 acres of Mills Creek Nature Park may see the 73-year-old shredding the trails on his single-speed mountain bike, cruising down the switchbacks he has worked so hard to perfect. Or, if they're really lucky, they may catch a rare sighting of the fun-loving adventurer dressed up as Sasquatch, roaming the mountain with a big smile on his face under that costume.

Or they may hear the chop of his swinging mattock echoing through the woods, as he moves earth, digs out roots, and breaks up rocks.

And perhaps the mountain man will hoot and holler at them from atop a rock outcropping, or pause from



PHOTO BY LINDA JILK

When Robertson finishes the new trail this summer, there will be 14 miles of trails in Mill Creek Nature Park.

clearing downed trees to chat, always bubbling over with enthusiasm about the new and old trails, eager to connect with others who are exploring this land that is close to his heart and inviting them to join him on a next adventure.

KEEPING THE DREAM ALIVE

He's currently building a new section of trail that will lead to scenic views from Sentinel Point overlooking the curve of the New River and the town of Narrows, and providing sweeping vistas all the way to Garden Mountain in Tazewell County and Pipestem Knob in West Virginia. Riders and hikers will be able to do a 7-mile loop from the parking area up to the point and down past the waterfalls or explore all 14 miles of Mill Creek trails.

"I usually go to the gym about three times a week," he jokes about his trail-building workout. "I start out with an hour-and-10-minute bike workout, then I do three to four hours upper body, and then a 25-minute cooldown. No membership required."

Robertson's been exploring, playing, camping, climbing, hunting, fishing, surviving copperhead encounters, and jumping in the lower falls' "sacred pool"

(clothing optional, he explains with a grin) on Wolf Creek Mountain for most of his life.

Born about "a mile down the holler" from the park, Robertson chuckles as he remembers the first time he was at Sentinel Point at 4 years old. "They had a lookout up there during the Civil War, we went up an old road and they didn't believe in switchbacks back then, it went straight up the mountain. Daddy would cut up a stick and he would hold it out straight and I'd hold on to it and he'd pull me up the mountain."

And that's the same mountain that gave him his life back after alcoholism tried to steal it away from him as a young adult.

After graduating from high school, Robertson served in Vietnam for about two years and says he had a rough time readjusting afterward, becoming addicted to both alcohol and cigarettes.

When he decided it was time to turn his life around in 1979, he started trail running and bicycling — and heading into the woods. "I ain't saying it was easy to quit, but when I just couldn't stand it any longer, and had to have a

(continued on page 8)

A Path Toward the Future

(continued from page 7)

cigarette or a drink, I'd take off and head to the top of the mountain and go as far as I could go."

This year, Robertson will celebrate 45 years since he drank any alcohol or smoked a cigarette.

And he's been on a mission ever since to clear old roads, create new trails, and improve access to this land — owned by the town of Narrows, private landowners and the National Forest Service — that has given him so much joy.

Robertson, who has moved rocks weighing over a ton and shouldered the setback of thieves stealing the tools that he hides in the woods, takes pride in the rideability of his trails.

"It feels good, seeing it take form, you know, the way you want. I want the trail to be where you can get on the bicycle and ride to the tower without stopping. In a 1-mile section there's 14 switchbacks. I call them 'Geezer Switchbacks' — I made them so I can ride them," he says.

He has no idea how many hours of trail work he's dedicated to Mill Creek trails since beginning to clear old roads in the 1980s, but he estimates that recently he put more than 100 hours of labor into perfecting just one switchback. "It was too sharp coming down and I wrecked on it a couple times, so I widened it out another 2 feet and now it rides really good. Perfect. A lot of the bikers, they say, 'Man I didn't have to even touch my brakes on that one.'"

Robertson may be building these trails and trail signs by hand, but he's definitely the bulldozer behind making the land accessible to recreators. In addition to the hundreds of hours he's put into building the trail, he's put many an hour into building relationships with important players — local governments, Virginia Outdoors Foundation, New River Land Trust, National Forest



PHOTO BY LINDA JILK

Robertson hiking Wolf Creek Mountain located in Giles County, Va.

Service, USDA, New River Valley Regional Commission, private landowners — to create better trail access.

AN EYE TO THE FUTURE

His efforts to work with the town of Narrows to build and refurbish trails has attracted the attention of numerous partners, not only friends and groups who have come to help with trail construction, but also conservation and economic development organizations that want to support his goal of expanding outdoor recreational opportunities.

"They say I'm the guy who builds those trails," says Robertson, "but an incredible amount of people has helped me. People think of the trails and they thank me and stuff, but it's incredible the people behind the scenes that they don't even mention that's helped with it. I feel kind of guilty when people say, 'You sure have built some nice trails, Ralph.' I'm thinking, I had a lot of help."

Most recently, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation approved a town of Narrows grant application that allows a parcel of land to be placed in a conservation easement, and provides funding for signage and waterless restrooms.

"The town has placed Mill Creek Nature Park, totaling 146 acres, in a permanent conservation easement to protect the land, the viewshed, and the public's access to the site. Ralph's trails will be his legacy for many years to come," says Nicholson.

Robertson dreams that an additional parcel, the 107 acres of now-private land that includes Sentinel Point and a cave, can also be placed in a conservation easement to protect his trails.

"The thing I'm doing, I'm just doing what I like to do. And it's really great that someone else gets to enjoy it too. I love for people to use it, and I really love that local people use it," he says. "The locals used to trash this place, but now they love it; they keep an eye on it, take care of it. Maybe 20 years ago they might be up here trashing it, but now it's their playground, they love it."

"Often locals who have lived here for their entire life lose some of their sense of awe about the place we live," says Nicholson. "Ralph is a constant reminder in our community to appreciate our natural surroundings daily."

Robertson hopes to finish the new Sentinel Point trail this summer, "if I don't break down. But I think my warranty's done run out," he laughs. Then, he says he will shift his focus to maintaining the current trails.

"When I was a boy, all I wanted to do was get out of this 'dead' place, you know how that goes," he says. "But now, I mean, to me it's like I'm just on a constant vacation and I don't have to travel. After I started running and biking and stuff, I realized I lived in paradise my whole life and didn't know it. If I could live anywhere in the world, I wouldn't even have to pack. I'm already there." ●



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PHOTO COURTESY MBC

PHOTOS BY JOHN GROTT

‘Before Broadband Was Cool’

MBC celebrates 20 years of fulfilling a need for speed

by Laura Emery, Staff Writer

For the past two decades, Mid-Atlantic Broadband Communities Corporation, a nonprofit based out of South Boston, Va., has been making great strides in securing southern Virginia’s future, one fiber connection at a time.

MBC provides high-speed broadband connectivity through an open-access, middle-mile fiber network that connects national carriers and telecommunication service providers — like AT&T, Verizon, Shentel, Lumos, Cox, etc. — with healthcare organizations, schools, libraries and other businesses in rural communities.

MBC has a 2,300-mile network and supports 233 cell towers.

Being at the helm of a company that successfully changed the digital landscape in southern Virginia and has revenues of more than \$17 million a year, it’s no wonder President & CEO Tad Deriso was named to Virginia Business’ Virginia 500: The 2020 Power List, and in 2019, to its 50 Most Influential Virginians list. “I’m not sure how that happened,” he says, jokingly.

The company, by all standards, is thriving. When MBC made its first customer connection in 2006, it had only four employees on the payroll.

Mid-Atlantic Broadband Communities Corporation is a nonprofit based out of South Boston, Va. Through a partnership with Microsoft and its TechSpark Initiative, the facility offers coworking spaces and brings together local nonprofit organizations from all over southern Virginia to offer programs that develop digital skills and entrepreneurial training.

There are now 30 employees working for MBC.

Some company highlights include MBC being awarded \$16 million in 2010 for a project to connect all K-12 schools in southern Virginia without any already-existing fiber connection. “That was a big deal for the communities,” Deriso explains.

But, says Deriso, he is most proud of MBC’s partnership with Microsoft and its TechSpark Initiative in 2019 that helped launch the SOVA Innovation Hub, a 15,000-square-foot two-story building in downtown South Boston, Va. — the first new building built downtown in over 40 years.

“The MBC team was growing and we needed to expand our office space. So I thought, ‘Why don’t we take a leadership position and build our own building that serves our expansion needs but also helps our communities? And what if we could get Microsoft to support new investments into programs that can accelerate economic growth for our communities in southern Virginia through their philanthropic side?’ Yes, Microsoft is a highly profitable multi-trillion-dollar corporation, but they care about giving back to their communities and helping people achieve more — and that tracks with us and our mission,” Deriso explains.

The new facility offers coworking spaces and brings together local nonprofit organizations from all over southern Virginia to offer programs that develop digital skills and entrepreneurial training.

MBC was also recently awarded a



PHOTO BY STEVE EXUM

“We put in infrastructure that makes a huge difference in the way people live, work and play in southern Virginia.”

— Tad Deriso

\$16.4 million federal grant from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to expand its middle-mile fiber infrastructure across 12 additional localities in Southside Virginia.

But through all the success, Deriso hasn't lost sight of the hard work it took to get the company off the ground. Nor has he forgotten the reason for its inception: revitalizing southern Virginia and helping to create jobs and investments.

He credits David Hudgins, former director of economic development for Old Dominion Electric Cooperative, as “the guy who made it all happen.”

For his part, Hudgins says, “Somebody had to do something.”

ON A MISSION

It was in 1997 that Hudgins says he first had a “realization” that rural Virginia was “winding down.” A wave of layoffs had recently swept through the state and it had many concerned about the future of southern Virginia.

In his role as director of economic development for the generation and

transmission cooperative headquartered in Glen Allen, Va., Hudgins knew the battered economy would ultimately impact ODEC's members, which included — at the time — 12 of Virginia's electric cooperatives. A large majority of its member cooperatives serve residents in rural areas, so a hit to rural economies was a hit to ODEC's member cooperatives.

“Something had to happen to give businesses the ability to compete in the struggling economy,” Hudgins remembers. “We needed to do something to create jobs and investments. And the solution was to bridge the digital divide in southern Virginia with high-speed broadband.”

As Hudgins recounts what occurred between 1997 and 2004 when Mid-Atlantic Broadband Cooperative was born, he repeatedly uses the expression, “long story short.”

But there was nothing “short” — or easy — about the work it took to take on such an immense forward-thinking project. After all, as Hudgins says playfully, “This was before broadband was cool.”

MONEY TALKS

ODEC's then-CEO Jack Reasor was on board with the idea of creating an independently operated wholesale telecommunications company. So, in 2001, ODEC hired Deriso, who was director of client services with CHR Solutions at the time.

“I had been consulting with rural telephone cooperatives, higher-education establishments, rural utilities, government entities, etc., all around the country — so I was used to that environment. But when we worked with cooperatives, what really stuck out to me was the seventh cooperative principle — Concern for Community. And I recognized that was the driver for ODEC,” Deriso recalls.

Hudgins explains, “We needed \$250,000 in seed money to get this thing going.” ODEC's board of directors approved appropriation of the funds toward the creation of Mid-Atlantic Broadband Cooperative. “Without them approving that \$250,000, it wouldn't have happened,” Hudgins says.

In 2004, Mid-Atlantic Broadband Cooperative, Inc., was founded under the cooperative business model — the first step to solving the rural telecommunications infrastructure challenge.

“This is what cooperatives do. We fill a void left by these big utility incumbents — which is exactly what we did in the 1930s when cooperatives banded together to bring electricity to unserved rural areas. If it weren't for the co-op system, it wouldn't have happened until much, much later,” says Hudgins.

What followed was a whirlwind of work for Deriso and Hudgins. “David and I traveled from Richmond to Washington, D.C., to the Eastern Shore to the Cumberland Gap trying to get this

(continued on page 12)

'Before Broadband Was Cool'

(continued from page 11)

thing going," Deriso says. "David had such a passion to make it work. He is a true champion for rural Virginia. David would not take 'no' for an answer. He deftly managed the project, despite there being so many challenges and obstacles."

A major challenge was fundraising. "You know what they say," Hudgins says. "It's not about the money, but it's about the money. If we solve the money problem, we knew we could solve the broadband problem." And a lot of money was needed to take it to the next level — to the tune of \$12 million to fund the first phase of the project (building the fiber backbone).

The U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration was willing to offer a \$6 million capital grant — the second-largest grant in EDA history east of the Mississippi, according to Hudgins.

But there was a catch. MBC had to find a way to match it — which Hudgins managed to do "in the nick of time."

One evening while dining at Richmond's The Tobacco Company Restaurant, Hudgins ran into Carthan Currin, who had just been appointed by Gov. James S. Gilmore as executive director of the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission. Currin was

meeting with VTC Chairman Charles Hawkins a few days later. Hudgins saw an opportunity. He recalls, with a laugh, "I said, Carthan, look, I got a project I want to talk to you about."

In 2004, MBC was awarded a \$6 million capital grant from the EDA, which was matched with a \$6 million capital grant from the VTC.

"We used the grant dollars to build the infrastructure that's a critical economic development asset for southern Virginia, and it's something that will be here for many decades to come," Deriso explains.

MBC was grateful for the leadership and support of VTC Chairman Charles

Hawkins and Carthan Currin who, according to Hudgins, "wrangled the \$6 million match through a 32-member commission — a task that should not be underestimated." MBC is also grateful to Neal Noyes, an EDA director who helped secure the initial grant for MBC, in addition to helping to direct a previous \$1.5 million grant to develop broadband in southwest Virginia. "These men were critical to getting the ball rolling, proving we had a real, funded project and not a wish-and-a-promise project," Hudgins adds.

Deriso agrees: "Sen. Hawkins, Carthan Currin, Neal Noyes ... they had the passion, saw the vision. We wouldn't be where we are today without their support."

Additional capital grants of \$24 million were awarded by the VTC in 2005 and 2006 to finish the first phase of the network, which was completed in September of 2006.

BUILD IT — THEY WILL COME

By 2007, MBC had successfully built more than 600 route miles of new fiber connecting 20 counties and four

"The success story of MBC speaks to the relevancy of cooperatives."

— David Hudgins

PHOTO COURTESY MBC



Tad Deriso and David Hudgins, 2007



PHOTO BY BOBBY ALLEN ROACH

"I am convinced that as important as the Interstate Highway System was in the '50s and '60s, the internet system is just as important to us today."

— Former Virginia Sen. Charles Hawkins
(quote from 2010)

cities to the network.

“What we do is very similar to what ODEC does,” Deriso explains. “ODEC is a generation and transmission cooperative. They own and run the power plants that provide power to many local electric co-ops, which then distribute it to their members. Well, there was nothing in telecom like that. So we basically became like an ODEC, where MBC was connecting the primary internet drains, or the hubs, in Northern Virginia, Richmond, Atlanta, etc., and bringing that massive capacity into rural Virginia, and then the ISPs — and now many of the electric cooperatives — are using our network to get to those primary internet connection hubs.”

Deriso managed the initial planning and network buildout, directed engineering and construction partners, developed relationships with ISPs, carriers and content providers, negotiated strategic infrastructure-sharing agreements, and built an internal team to support sustainable operations.

In 2012, MBC made a strategic decision to transition from a 501(c)(12) cooperative to a 501(c)(4) nonprofit corporation and changed its name from Mid-Atlantic Broadband Cooperative to Mid-Atlantic Broadband Communities Corporation.

But its business model, pricing structure, customer focus and guiding principle remained the same.

“The whole idea is to level the playing field. If you’re a business, you should pay the same in rural Virginia as you would pay in Northern Virginia for broadband capacity. That was, and still is, the guiding principle,” says Deriso.

A NEED FOR SPEED

Deriso says that the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic was a huge



PHOTO COURTESY MBC

growth driver for high-speed broadband. “It’s the same concept as power. It’s getting cold, so we turn up the heat and use more power. When we use more power, your local electric cooperative needs more power — so ODEC delivers more power. Same thing with us. But in our world, it’s not billion-dollar power stations, it’s multi-billion-dollar data centers.”

If you didn’t have high-speed broadband during the COVID pandemic, it was difficult — and, for many in rural areas, impossible — to transition to remote work and remote learning, or to access healthcare services, apply for public assistance, or order groceries or prescriptions.

According to the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, “Quarantine measures due to COVID-19 resulted in an acceleration in the adoption of digital services and broadband infrastructure.”

Hudgins says, “The pandemic changed the mindset from high-speed broadband ‘would be nice to have’ to ‘got to have it.’”

JOB WELL DONE

According to Deriso, the reason for the company’s continued success is simple: “We do well by doing good,” he says. “We put in infrastructure that makes a huge difference in the way people live, work and play in

southern Virginia — and that’s the most gratifying, along with seeing it all come together and knowing that the original vision worked.”

MBC has accomplished, over the last two decades, all that it was created to do. It has enabled more than 2,000 jobs and \$10 billion in private-sector investments in the region.

“Tad’s work at the helm of MBC has been stellar, especially when it comes to helping the community and being a catalyst for change in Southside Virginia,” says Hudgins.

Deriso says the company’s future is bright. “We will continue to build out our infrastructure and expand to where our customers need it, getting out into more rural areas. We also hope to continue partnering with electric cooperatives as they build out their infrastructure to ensure their members have access to high-speed internet services,” he says.

In short, MBC is all about connections: connections to the internet, connections to the community, and connections to new jobs and new investments in southern Virginia.

“At the end of the day,” says Hudgins, “the success story of MBC speaks to the relevancy of cooperatives, that there is still a place — even in the 21st century — for people pulling together to make things happen that wouldn’t happen otherwise.” ●

SOVA

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dhcd.maryland.gov/Residents/Pages/wap/default.aspx
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Tree Trimming: Part of NOVEC's Commitment to Safety and Reliability



P.O. Box 2710, Manassas, VA 20108
novec.com | 703-335-0500

Welcome to March! It's the beginning of spring, a time to fire up the lawnmower, clean off the grill, and appreciate the leaves returning to trees throughout your neighborhood. Trees beginning to bud and March winds remind me of the delicate balance NOVEC strikes to be a good steward of our environment while maintaining industry-leading reliability metrics. Those growing trees and branches present a constant challenge to NOVEC's goal of delivering reliable electricity.

Our Vegetation Management team works year-round to minimize risks posed by trees and branches to the Co-op's 1,800 miles of rights-of-way. Trees cause over 700 outage cases annually and account for almost 40% of all outage minutes. This includes live trees, dead trees, and trees both inside and outside our easements. Diseased trees — ash and oak trees especially — have presented a unique challenge in recent years.

Responsibly managing tree growth is essential to our successful efforts to bring reliable power to your homes and businesses, and to promote safety for you and our workforce. NOVEC manages vegetation on a 3 1/2-year cycle, one of the shortest in the industry. We do this to keep our easements free from obstructions and open to workers. We also employ modern satellite imagery to enhance our view of vegetation risks.

NOVEC supports property owners in choosing appropriate types of vegetation near power lines and electrical equipment. Find guidelines on novec.com for compatible species and setback distances that allow trees and electric lines to peacefully coexist.

Low-growing shrubs, wildflowers, and milkweed within easements can naturally support wildlife. Trees planted in specific locations can actually lower your electric bill by providing shade in the summer and protection from cold winter winds.

As we see nature bring the world back to life this spring, enjoy the flowering blossoms knowing NOVEC is doing its best to manage tree-related outages and keep the lights on. See page 18 to learn more.

Best Regards,

Dave Schleicher

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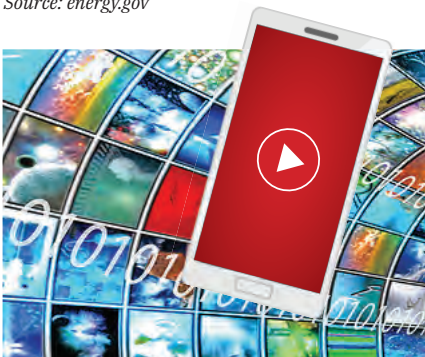
For updates, tips on safety, energy savings ideas, and career information, find us on social media or go to novec.com.

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ENERGY TIP OF THE MONTH

When streaming online content, use the smallest device that makes sense for the number of people watching. Avoid streaming on game consoles, which use 10 times more power than streaming through a tablet or laptop.

Source: energy.gov



NOVEC VALUES		
• Integrity	• Safety	• Excellence
• Accountability	• Teamwork	• Innovation

Halifax Biomass Plant Celebrates

10-YEAR Anniversary

By Robin Earl

In December 2023, NOVEC celebrated the 10-year anniversary of the opening of the Biomass Electric Generating Facility in Halifax. Since the facility opened in 2013, it has diverted approximately 3.6 million tons of wood waste to produce more than 2.3 million megawatts (MW) of clean renewable energy. The plant significantly reduces the amount of wood waste that would otherwise be burned in piles or landfilled, and local farmers use the residual ash to reduce the soil acidity of more than 25,000 acres of land.

“Providing reliable energy from wood waste that clears the way for new growth in the forest makes the biomass facility a truly renewable resource that we can all be proud of,” said Halifax County Biomass Fuel Procurement and Plant Operations Manager Mike Davis.

NOVEC does not buy tracts of timber nor does it cut down trees to fuel the biomass facility. Instead, it relies on wood waste from local commercial logging and timber operations as they harvest timber. NOVEC offers landowners an outlet for the resulting limbs and undergrowth. A local lumber mill also provides fuel for the biomass plant.

After one generation of trees has been harvested, the land must be cleared to plant the next generation. Using best forest management practices, NOVEC’s biomass plant helps landowners to reforest Virginia.

The Halifax plant is a synergistic facility, explained Gil Jaramillo, vice president of NOVEC’s power supply division. “The Halifax County Biomass Facility traps particulates created when wood is combusted,” he said. “We also have an ash-reinjection system that captures larger carbon particles and injects them back into the combustion chamber to burn. We distribute the resulting ash to local farmers for them to use as a liming agent. Lime can improve the availability of essential nutrients in the soil and make the soil pH more alkaline, which is better for growing plants.”

Conscious of water as a precious resource, Jaramillo said, “The plant uses water reclaimed from a nearby wastewater treatment facility for cooling.”



NOVEC's Biomass Plant is located in Halifax, Va.

Community Contributions

Over the past decade, the biomass facility has become a cornerstone of the South Boston and Halifax communities, and a valued friend to local businesses. The plant regularly sponsors youth athletic teams, and 4-H camp participants, festivals, and parades. NOVEC also established an annual \$1,500 college scholarship for a Halifax High School student.

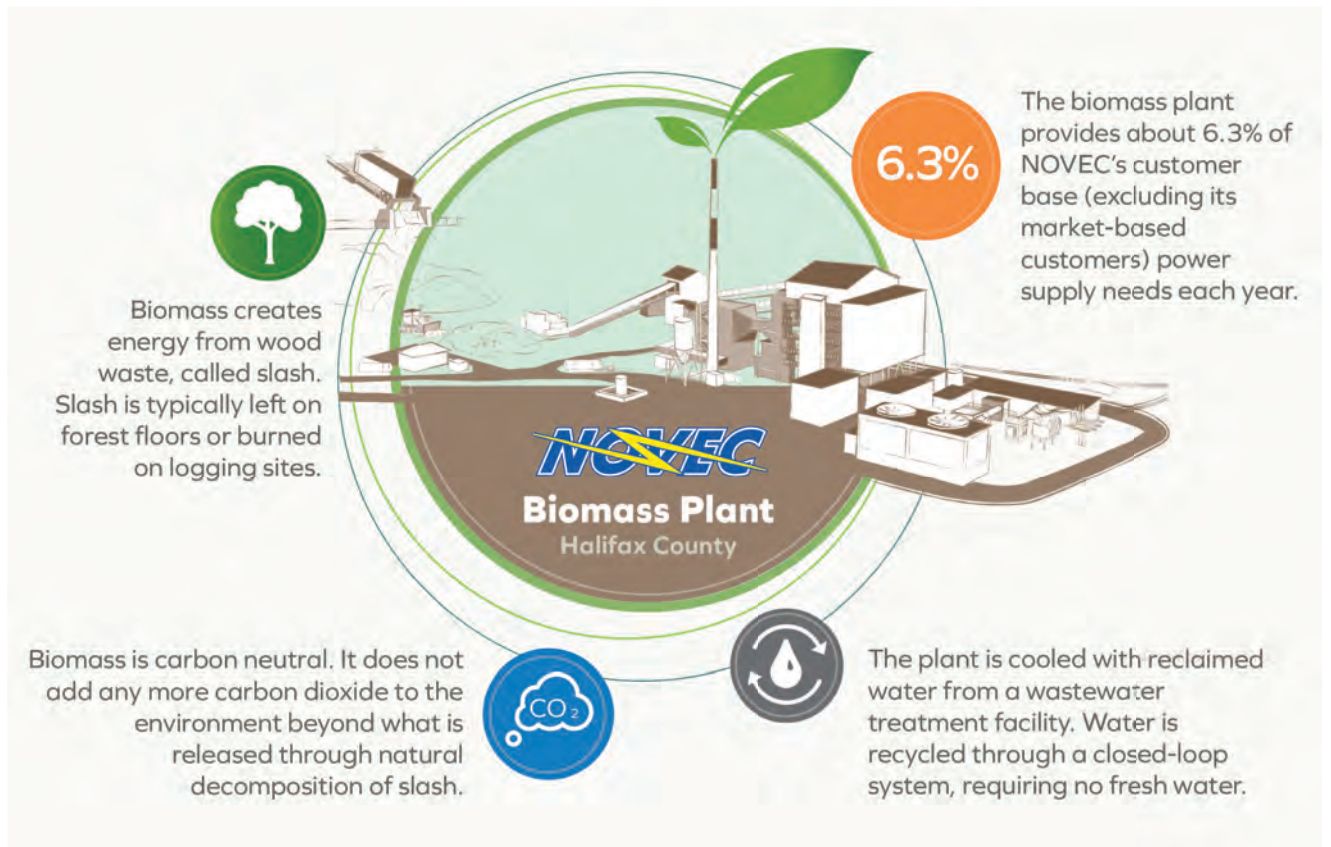
The plant hosts tours throughout the year for legislators, community members, and high school and college students as part of its educational outreach. These tours provide guests with a firsthand look at operations, allowing students and community leaders, lawmakers, and civic leaders to ask questions of energy industry experts. Through this experience, students have developed an interest in the power industry, and politicians have gained a deeper understanding of the benefits of the facility.



The biomass plant's combustion chamber makes steam for power generation.



A truck dumps wood chips at the biomass plant for power generation.





A NOVEC contractor trims trees around power lines.

Protecting Power Lines

Looking Up to Stay Ahead of Outages

By Robin Earl

Overgrown or falling trees are among the most common causes of power outages. Sometimes a howling winter storm can knock a tree branch into power lines; other times it's just a tree that grows too tall in the wrong place. To minimize unnecessary outages, NOVEC engages in proactive vegetation management all year round.

Since the early 1990s, NOVEC has orchestrated a detailed tree-trimming schedule throughout its service area. To manage the 1,800 miles of rights-of-way, NOVEC trims close to 500 miles every year. "About 75 tree-trimming professionals from three different contractors cover every inch of our territory every 3 1/2 years," said Rick Carpenter, manager of NOVEC's vegetation management department.

But a lot can happen between scheduled trimmings, and NOVEC members are helpful in bringing potential issues to the Co-op's attention. "About 50% of the unscheduled work we do happens because our members tell us about dead trees or limbs touching or getting too close to a power line," said Carpenter. "We create several thousand trouble tickets a year to handle trees that could present problems."

He explained that sometimes a tree will die unexpectedly and threaten to fall on a power line; other times a tree will grow too close to infrastructure. When a tree makes even slight contact with a power line, it may cause the lights inside any affected homes to blink. It's an early

warning system that alerts NOVEC to a situation that may need attention.

What's involved in vegetation management?

While NOVEC doesn't own the trees in its 30-foot power line rights-of-way, the Co-op has an obligation to keep the power lines clear.

As a part of the maintenance process, crews trim trees and mow undergrowth, but there are limits to what they can do because NOVEC does not own the trees. Large segments of wood are the landowner's responsibility. "We don't remove all wood from the property, but we sometimes turn the brush into chips and dispose of that," said Carpenter.

All tree trimming done by NOVEC contractors is considered "natural directional pruning," which means branches that must be trimmed are removed flush with a larger limb if possible, to promote a healthier tree. Contractors trim branches growing toward or over NOVEC lines to encourage remaining branches to grow away from lines.

When trees are located directly under lines, however, their tops will be taken off or the tree will be removed entirely in order to maintain safe electrical clearances and space for equipment access. At a minimum, trees are trimmed to at least 6 feet below NOVEC's lowest pole conductor or 10 feet in any other direction.



HELP NOVEC PREVENT POWER OUTAGES

Report any potentially hazardous trees or bushes around power lines to NOVEC's Customer Care department at 703-335-0500.

HOMEOWNERS

Be aware of power lines when planting new trees. Refrain from planting trees in NOVEC's maintenance corridors.

CONTACT

NOVEC's Vegetation Management department at 703-392-1600 or vegetationmgmt@novec.com with questions *before* you plant.



FOR MORE INFO: The NOVEC website has extensive information on vegetation management — everything from landscaping standards to how to dispose of excess wood.

Environmental concerns

Environmentally approved herbicides are used judiciously to keep rights-of-way clear. "We apply herbicides very selectively. We normally only spray brush, trees, and vines. We leave the briars and weeds that keep the growth down," said Carpenter. Dense brush that doesn't hinder crew access is encouraged because it prevents trees from taking root.

After mowing, low undergrowth will come back fast and provide a good wildlife habitat. "And sometimes we will spread some wildflower seeds around to help with that process," Carpenter added.



NOVEC contractors use trimming techniques that promote healthier trees.

Technology Speaks for the Trees

By Robin Earl

Satellites may soon allow NOVEC to precisely map out its overhead lines on its Geographic Information System (GIS). This new technology will overlay trees

on the maps, so vegetation management experts can see at a glance where trees might potentially interfere with power lines.

The technology is still being fine-tuned, but about one-quarter of NOVEC's service territory has been mapped thus far. Instead of driving around to physically see which trees may need immediate attention, Rick Carpenter, manager of NOVEC's vegetation management department, said he may soon be able to view it all on the GIS screen. "We are finding a few challenges as we work with the system," he said. "We are still testing out what it can do."

"By detecting chlorophyll levels in the leaves of the trees, the tech can tell how tall a tree is, if it is in decline, and if it might need to be removed."

RICK CARPENTER, MANAGER OF NOVEC'S VEGETATION MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Operation Round Up Helps Eligible NOVEC Members Pay Their Power Bills

By Robin Earl

Participants in NOVEC's Operation Round Up® (ORU) program volunteer to round up their bills each month to the next dollar. This spare change adds up quickly, and NOVEC provides these resources to local nonprofits, which in turn use those funds to pay the power bills of NOVEC customers who might not otherwise be able to pay their electric bills.

Households with a past-due account or an account that has fallen into disconnect status may apply to one of the nonprofits for assistance. The agencies determine a customer's eligibility to receive emergency energy assistance. If you are a NOVEC member and are experiencing financial hardships that prevent you from paying your electric bill, contact one of the organizations listed.



ORGANIZATIONS HELPING FAMILIES THROUGH OPERATION ROUND UP

- **The Salvation Army — Loudoun Corps**
703-771-3371
loudoun.salvationarmypotomac.org
- **Northern Virginia Family Service**
571-285-2032
nvfs.org
- **Western Fairfax Christian Ministries**
703-988-9656
wfcmvva.org
- **ACTS**
(serving Manassas and Dumfries)
703-368-4141
actspwc.org

Sign Up to Support Operation Round Up

HOW DOES OPERATION ROUND UP BENEFIT THOSE IN NEED?

The program is completely voluntary; each month, NOVEC “rounds up” participating customers’ bills to the nearest dollar. For example, a bill of \$69.54 is rounded up to \$70. The extra 46 cents goes into the ORU fund, and that money is distributed to charitable organizations that assist customers in need. NOVEC pays all administrative costs of the program.

HOW MUCH CAN I EXPECT TO CONTRIBUTE EACH YEAR?

The “rounded up” amount averages a total of \$6 per year for each customer. The monthly billing statement shows how much is being donated each month.

HOW WILL OPERATION ROUND UP WORK IF I AM ON NOVEC'S BUDGET BILLING PAYMENT PLAN?

Budget billing allows you to avoid significant variations in your monthly NOVEC bills by averaging the previous 11 monthly bills and the current month's bill. Even during the hottest or coldest months of the year, the amount you pay each month is within a consistent range.

Those who enroll in budget billing are welcome to participate in ORU. The donation amount is based on the actual amount of electricity a customer uses in a given month, and that amount is itemized on each bill.

How do I contribute to Operation Round Up?

Sign up online through your SmartHub account or call NOVEC's Customer Care Center at 703-335-0500. One-time donations from NOVEC customers or those outside our service territory are also welcome. Mail in a check for any amount, payable to NOVEC Operation Round Up. Send to: NOVEC ORU, P.O. Box 2710, Manassas, VA 20108. More information may be found at novec.com.



NOVEC keeps you humming along ...

Isn't it nice when your everyday life hums along exactly as you expected?

With a **99.99%** reliability rating, online and traditional payment methods, and **24/7** service, getting electricity from NOVEC may be the most unexciting part of your life.

And that's okay.

Keep humming along with reliable power from NOVEC.



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SAFETY CHECK



Did you know?

A power surge is typically caused by lightning, changes in electrical loads, faulty wiring, or damaged power lines.

Install power strips with surge protection to protect sensitive equipment.

- Easy to use (just plug them in)
- Protects electronics plugged into the device
- Must be replaced over time or after a major surge event

ENERGY TRIVIA

By sealing uncontrolled air leaks in your home, you can save _____% on heating and cooling bills.

Answer: 10%



REMEMBER: Not all power strips offer surge protection. Carefully read the packaging labels when purchasing.

WRITE ON

Youth Writing Contest

Students, crank up your imagination along with your keyboard!

NOVEC is sponsoring a creative writing contest for children aged 5 to 16 who have a parent or guardian living in a home that receives electricity from the Cooperative.

Children can submit an original, fictional story of no more than 500 words where electricity is the “hero” of the story. The deadline is 5 p.m. on Wednesday, May 15; there is a limit of one submission per person.

Prizes will be awarded to the best story by a student:

- 5-9 years old
- 10-13 years old
- 14-16 years old

Portions of the winning stories will be featured in an issue of *Cooperative Living*.



MAKE ELECTRICITY THE HERO OF THE STORY.

MAIL ENTRIES TO: Writing Contest, NOVEC Public Relations, P.O. Box 2710, Manassas, VA 20108, or email communications@novec.com.

SUBMISSIONS DUE: 5 p.m., Wednesday, May 15, 2024

EMISSIONS REPORT:

Notice of Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative regarding 2023 fuel mix and emissions data

Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative (NOVEC) purchases power to provide service to its power-supply portfolio customers through various wholesale contracts. Power-supply service for NOVEC's market-based customers is independently procured on a daily and annual basis by NOVEC from the Pennsylvania-New Jersey-Maryland Interconnection (PJM) Energy and Capacity Markets.

The Halifax County Biomass Plant, a NOVEC affiliate, supplies 6.3% of the Cooperative's purchased power. Other renewable sources include 0.8% from landfill gas, 1.7% from hydropower, and 0.1% from solar. Supply

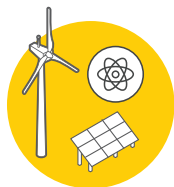
from the above renewables — as well as the remaining 91.1% that comes from power purchased largely through bilateral third-party contracts and the PJM spot market — make up the supply service to NOVEC's power-supply portfolio customers.

The PJM grid has a fuel mix and emission data profile of 43.8% natural gas, 33.3% nuclear, 14.7% coal, 7.2% renewables, and 1% other fuels.

For additional information on PJM regional emissions, visit pjm.com/library/reports-notice.aspx. For additional information on NOVEC-specific emissions, visit novec.com/About_NOVEC/Power-Supply.cfm.

Staff Report by Robin Earl

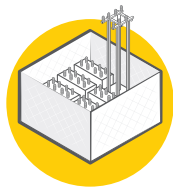
HOW ELECTRICITY GETS TO YOU



step 1

Generation

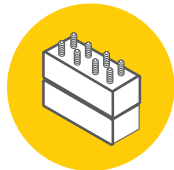
Electricity is generated from various sources.



step 5

Distribution Substation

Voltage is lowered further for safe distribution.



step 2

Step-Up Transformer

Voltage is increased to push the electricity over long distances.



step 6

Distribution Power Lines

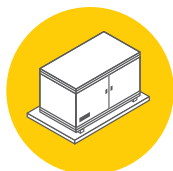
Electricity travels across these lines in your community.



step 3

Transmission Power Lines

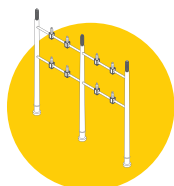
Lines carry electricity over long distances.



step 7

Final Stop

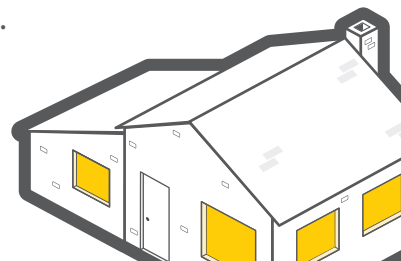
A transformer reduces voltage a final time, and electricity is sent to your home.



step 4

Transmission Substation

Voltage is lowered so electricity can travel across the local system.



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For rules and details,
visit co-opliving.com/contests/youth-art.

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Getting Your Ducts in a Row

Efficiency tips for manufactured homes

by Miranda Boutelle, Contributing Columnist



Q: I live in a manufactured home. How can I keep the inside temperature more comfortable and save on energy bills?

A: There are several tasks you can complete to improve comfort and use less energy in your manufactured home — air sealing, duct sealing, adding insulation, and installing new windows, showerheads, faucet aerators and lightbulbs.

More than 22 million Americans live in manufactured homes, according to the National Association of State Energy Officials. Manufactured homes represent 15% of housing in rural areas, and only 3% in urban areas.

Knowing how manufactured homes are built helps us understand where we can seal in savings around the house. These homes are constructed in factories and then transported and set up on-site. Construction in a factory reduces costs, making manufactured homes an affordable option. That lower price point can come, in part, from the use of less expensive equipment and fewer materials, such as lower-efficiency heating equipment or less insulation.

If you already live in a manufactured home, you likely know that manufactured homes are constructed in sections. One section is a single-wide home, two are combined to make a double-wide home and three make a triple-wide home.

In my experience, the biggest issues were in the duct systems, which deliver heating and cooling throughout the homes. The ductwork is typically located in the cavity between the floor and the transport barrier, which protects the underside of the manufactured home while it is transported from the factory to the site. Typically, one long duct runs the length of each section of the home, with the registers or vents cut into it.

The first step is making sure all registers are accessible, open and not covered by furniture, rugs, dog beds or anything else.

Next, check your ductwork by removing the registers and looking inside. Anything inside the duct will restrict airflow,

so check that it is free and clear. Use a mirror and flashlight to look into the duct, or take a picture by sticking a camera or phone inside and snapping some shots with flash in each direction. I've pulled all kinds of things out of ducts over the years, from garbage to toys to shoes.

If you have a double wide or triple wide, you will likely have a crossover duct, which joins the ducts in each section. The crossover duct is typically a large flexible duct with an inner liner, insulation and an outer cover to protect the insulation. Damaged or disconnected crossover ducts allow the air you pay to heat escape under the home. Often, damage is done by animals chewing or scratching to get inside the warm area. An inspection of the crossover duct requires crawling under the home. That's a dirty job and often a tight spot, so you might choose to hire a professional.

Another place to check is the joint joining the sections of a double wide or triple wide together. This is often covered by trim when the home is placed. You can caulk around the trim or remove it and caulk underneath to reduce air leakage.

Weatherstripping doors and windows to make sure they seal tightly will also reduce drafts and save energy. Some homes can benefit from additional insulation in the attic or under the floor. Those projects typically require specialized equipment or help from a professional. Check with your county or electric utility for more information. ●

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy-efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

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▶ Holiday Guide

Publication: Nov. 1, 2024

Space Reservation Deadline: Sept. 26, 2024

Don't miss this chance to have your biggest attendance ever! *Cooperative Living's* special Fairs & Festivals sections are coming up in our June, September and November-December issues.

Each issue of *Cooperative Living* reaches over 600,000 homes and businesses throughout Virginia and Maryland — that's more than 1.8 million readers and potential visitors to your festival or special event.

Take advantage of our circulation and make sure your festival or special event is included!

CooperativeLiving

CONTACT: SONJA KINNEY | skinney@vmdaec.com | 804-297-3429

A River Runs Through It

Waynesboro restaurant runs the gamut with creative burger offerings

by Peggy Hyland, Contributing Columnist



Got a restaurant for Peggy to review?
Let us know at editor@co-opliving.com.

In the heart of downtown Waynesboro, we stepped into the relaxed atmosphere of The River Burger Bar. The shiplap walls echo the nautical theme, with fishing poles, nets and river photos. The casual, family-friendly atmosphere was as welcoming as the staff.

The creative and innovative menu echoes the nautical theme. The Davy Knot was a huge Bavarian-style pretzel.

As it baked, it split itself into a big smiley face, which brought smiles to our faces, especially when dipped in the delicious beer cheese dip. It was divine: zippy, creamy and rich, a perfect complement to the salty pretzel. We also dug into the Reel Wisconsin Cheese Curds, which came with a zesty spicy ranch sauce.

I could not resist the beet salad, which featured mixed greens, earthy beets, dried cherries, Craisins, pumpkin seeds and goat cheese. A delectable balsamic vinaigrette tied it all together beautifully. Beets and goat cheese are a match made in heaven, and the combination of dried fruits and seeds elevated the dish. The mix of textures and tastes was the star of our meal, and my meat-loving companion polished it off before even trying the pretzel.

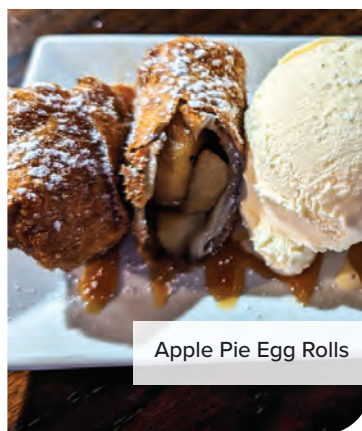
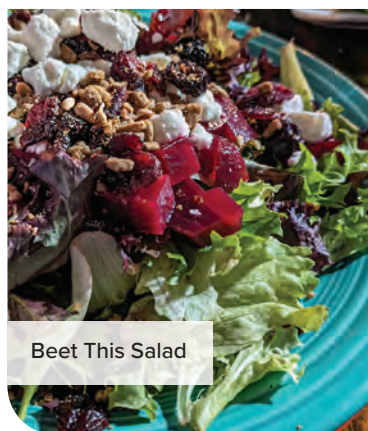
Since burgers are the house specialty, we both chose from their imaginative offerings. Few Southerners can resist the call of a good pimento cheese spread, and we were no exception. I opted for the Bacon Pimento Burger, with the patty topped with bacon, pimento cheese spread and grilled onions. My companion chose The Chilito Hot Dish, with the pimento cheese spread, Fritos, grilled onions, jalapeños and house-

made chili. The veggie chili was warm and comforting, with just the right amount of spice. The Fritos added a nice crunch, and the fresh jalapeños added a little kick. Our sides were crispy house-made potato chips and onion rings, which were generously battered and fried to crunchy perfection.

The River rotates its desserts weekly, featuring the offerings of local bakeries. The very popular Red Velvet Ice Cream Sandwich was sold out, but we were very happy with the Apple Pie Egg Rolls. Crisp and flaky crusts surrounded the delectable apples, with generous spices and a dusting of powdered sugar. They were made in-house, served à la mode, with a luscious caramel that balanced out the sweetness.

The service was friendly and fast, without feeling rushed. We were there between the lunch and dinner rushes, but the midafternoon is still very popular. There are a few TVs for those interested in sports, but not enough to be distracting to the rest of the crowd. The beer list emphasizes local offerings. Just minutes from I-64 and the entrance to the Blue Ridge Tunnel, The

River would be a perfect place to stop in for a break from driving, a relaxing bite while shopping downtown, or a big burger after a long hike. ●



The River Burger Bar
137 N. Wayne Ave., Waynesboro, Va.
540-943-3339
Monday/Tuesday/Thursday/Sunday 11 a.m.-8 p.m.;
Friday/Saturday 11 a.m.-10 p.m.
theriverburgerbar.com



COOKIN' WITH Carrots



Check out these very a-peeling carrot recipes!

Carrot Nut Cupcakes

Recipe courtesy of Joann Hensley

Ingredients:

2 cups all-purpose flour	1 ½ cups grapeseed oil
1 teaspoon baking powder	2 cups sugar
1 teaspoon baking soda	4 eggs
1 teaspoon cinnamon	2 cups carrots, finely grated
¼ teaspoon salt	1 cup black walnuts, finely chopped

Frosting:

8 oz. cream cheese, softened	½ cup flaked coconut
¼ cup butter (no substitutes), softened	⅔ cup black walnuts or pecans, chopped
2 cups powdered sugar	

Directions: *For cupcakes:* Sift together the first 5 ingredients; combine oil and sugar in a large mixing bowl. Add eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. Gradually add dry ingredients, mixing well. Fold in carrots and walnuts. Fill paper-lined muffin cups two-thirds full. Bake at 400 degrees for 12-18 minutes or until toothpick comes out clean. Cool for 5 minutes before removing from pans to wire racks to cool completely.

For frosting: In a large mixing bowl, combine cream cheese and butter. Beat on low speed for 30 seconds. Gradually add powdered sugar. Combine well. Beat in coconut and nuts; frost cooled cupcakes and store in the refrigerator.

Parmesan-Roasted Carrots

Recipe courtesy of Wendy Lankford

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons butter, melted	4 tablespoons Parmesan cheese
2 teaspoons garlic, minced	1 teaspoon fresh parsley, chopped
8-10 carrots, peeled	

Directions: Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Mix butter and garlic together. Place carrots on parchment-lined baking sheet and drizzle with butter mixture. Roast for 30 minutes, shaking pan occasionally to rotate carrots. Top with cheese and roast 20 more minutes, or until done as desired. Top with parsley and serve immediately.



Orange-Honey-Glazed Carrots

Recipe courtesy of Family Features/Source: Florida Department of Citrus

Ingredients:

2 cups sliced carrots
¼ cup orange juice
1 teaspoon honey
1 teaspoon cornstarch
⅛ teaspoon salt
⅛ teaspoon ground ginger
fresh parsley, for garnish
fresh chives, for garnish



Directions: Steam carrots until tender. In saucepan over medium heat, whisk orange juice, honey, cornstarch, salt and ginger. Cover, whisking constantly until sauce thickens. Pour sauce over steamed carrots. Top with parsley and chives.

Got a tasty treat to share?

Email your favorite smoothie recipes and blueberry recipes to cooperativekitchen@co-opliving.com, or mail to Cooperative Kitchen, c/o Cooperative Living, P.O. Box 2340, Glen Allen, VA 23058-2340 and include your email address.

You also can submit them online at co-opliving.com/cooperativekitchen. Selected recipes will be published in future issues of *Cooperative Living* or at co-opliving.com. Because of volume we cannot guarantee publication of all recipes. Reader recipes are submitted in good faith. *Cooperative Living* cannot warrant results.



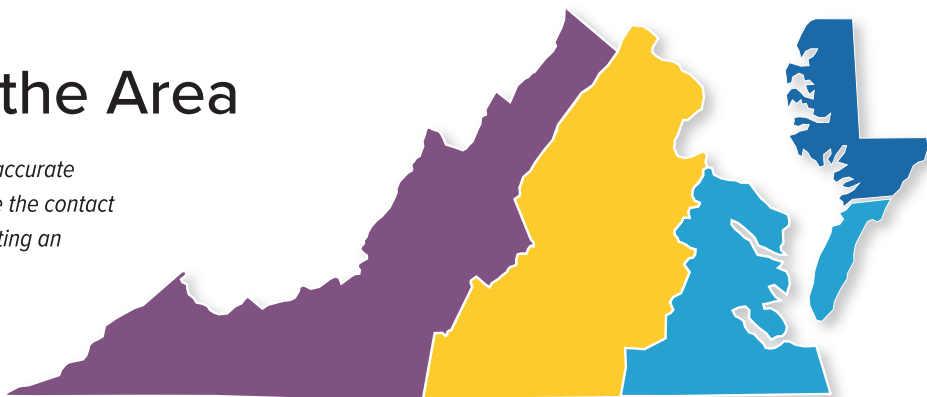
Drop the temp. Boost your savings.

A super simple way to be your Household Hero is to take your water heater's temperature down a notch or twenty. Although some manufacturers set water heater thermostats at 140 degrees, it is not necessary. By turning down the temperature to 120 degrees, you can save energy and money.

Need a new water heater? Consider size and efficiency. Picking an ENERGY STAR qualified model, properly sized to your home, can save you money in operating costs. There are even new Wi-Fi enabled models that let you manage the ideal temperature, right from your phone.

Events Around the Area

Editor's note: All information is believed to be accurate as of press time. Before you attend, please use the contact information to verify the status of an event. Listing an event does not constitute an endorsement.



BLUE RIDGE WEST

MARCH

16-17 HIGHLAND CO. Highland County Maple Festival. Highlandcounty.org.

17 CLIFTON FORGE. Shortest St. Patrick's Day Parade in VA. 510 Main St. 5 p.m. Facebook.com/cliftonforgemainstreet.

29-30 WINCHESTER. Lord Fairfax Orchid Society Annual Show and Sale. Museum of the Shenandoah Valley. 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Lfoswinchester@icloud.com.

30 CLIFTON FORGE. Easter Bonnet Parade. Downtown Clifton Forge. 11 a.m. Facebook.com/cliftonforgemainstreet.

PIEDMONT

MARCH

29-30 GOOCHLAND. American Legion Auxiliary Goochland County's Indoor Yard Sale. American Legion Post 215, 3386 River Rd. W. Goochlandala.org.

30 WOODBRIDGE. Spring Paper Shred. Pfitzner Stadium. 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Pwcva.gov.

APRIL

7-10 HARRISONBURG. NARFE Virginia Federation Conference. Hotel Madison. Vanarfe.org.

12-14 BERRYVILLE. Northern Shenandoah Valley Quilt Show. Clark County Parks & Rec. Center. Nsvquiltshow.com.

14 MINERAL. 40th Annual Belmont Ham & Oyster Dinner. 7124 Belmont Rd. 4-7 p.m. Cherylmarshbcow@gmail.com.

TIDEWATER

MARCH

16 ONANCOCK. O'Nancock St. Patrick's Parade. Onancock Historic District. 2-4 p.m. Allevents.in/onancock/saint-patricks-day.

29-30 CHINCOTEAGUE. 43rd Chincoteague Island Easter Decoy & Art Festival. Chincoteague Combined School. Chincoteaguechamber.com.

APRIL

13 COLONIAL BEACH. Virginia Osprey Festival. Town Hill. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Virginiaospreyfoundation.org.

MARYLAND

MARCH

17 EASTON. St. Patrick's Parade. Downtown Easton. 5:30 p.m. Tourtalbot.org.

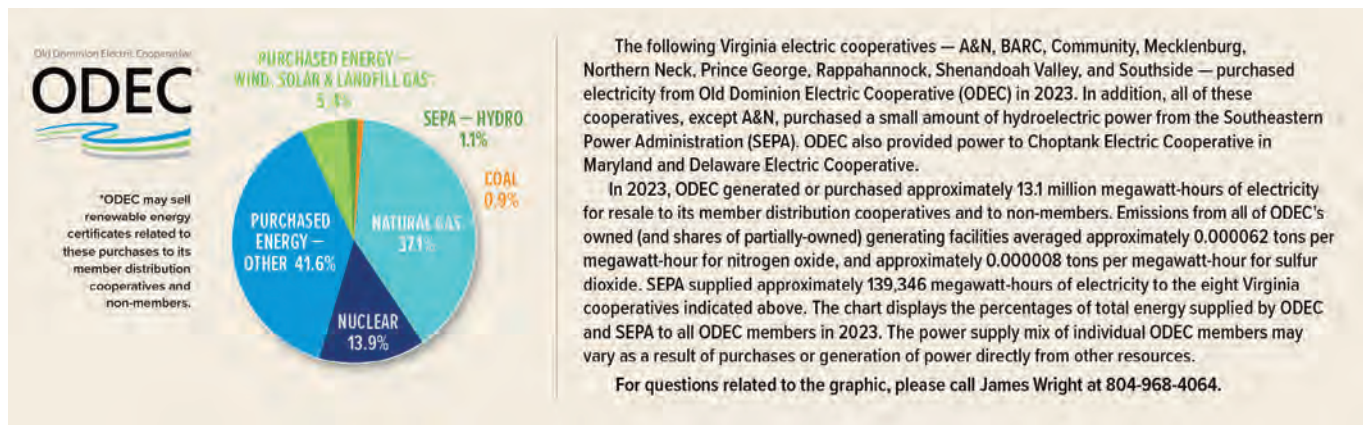
31 EASTON. Annual Easter Egg Hunt. Talbot County Courthouse. 10 a.m. Tourtalbot.org.

PRINT DEADLINES: April 1 for May 15-June 15
May 1 for June 15-July 15

Email: happenings@co-opliving.com

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It was a perfect late autumn day in the Northern Rockies. Not a cloud in the sky, and just enough cool in the air to stir up nostalgic memories of my trip into the backwoods. This year, though, was different. I was going it solo. My two buddies, pleading work responsibilities, backed out at the last minute. So, armed with my trusty knife, I set out for adventure.

Well, what I found was a whole lot of trouble. As in 8 feet and 800-pounds of trouble in the form of a grizzly bear. Seems this grumpy fella was out looking for some adventure too. Mr. Grizzly saw me, stood up to his entire 8 feet of ferocity and let out a roar that made my blood turn to ice and my hair stand up. Unsnapping my leather sheath, I felt for my hefty, trusty knife and felt emboldened. I then showed the massive grizzly over 6 inches of 420 surgical grade stainless steel, raised my hands and yelled, "Whoa bear! Whoa bear!" I must have made my point, as he gave me an almost admiring grunt before turning tail and heading back into the woods.

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I was pretty shaken, but otherwise fine. Once the adrenaline high subsided, I decided I had some work to do back home too. That was more than enough adventure for one day.

Our Grizzly Hunting Knife pays tribute to the call of the wild. Featuring stick-tang construction, you can feel confident in the strength and durability of this knife. And the hand carved, natural bone handle ensures you won't lose your grip even in the most dire of circumstances. I also made certain to give it a great price. After all, you should be able to get your point across without getting stuck with a high price.

But we don't stop there. While supplies last, we'll include a pair of \$99 8x21 power compact binoculars **FREE** when you purchase the Grizzly Hunting Knife.

Make sure to act quickly. The Grizzly Hunting Knife has been such a hit that we're having trouble keeping it in stock. Our first release of more than 1,200 SOLD OUT in TWO DAYS! After months of waiting on our artisans, we've finally gotten some knives back in stock. Only 1,337 are available at this price, and half of them have already sold!

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Birthday Probes, Long Drives and Glowing in the Dark

Further adventures in the medical vortex

by Margo Oxendine, Contributing Columnist



First of all, thank you to all those who sent cards, letters and emails hoping for my health. Your wishes and prayers

are appreciated.

And, I still need them.

Turns out, I must have two heart operations. The prospect of one was bad enough; now, two? Bah!

These are unfortunately split out between one hospital, which I like, and know my way around, and can even drive to myself — and another, in the scary, unknown land of Charlottesville, which is 100 miles each way. I just don't have it in me to drive 100 miles, go through a lot of medical hoops, and then hop in the car and drive 100 miles home.

So, I must find friends who will drive me. At first, this was easy.

A close friend who goes to Charlottesville all the time offered. But, after trip #2, he suddenly had other things to do that were more pressing. And fun. I really can't blame him; he was great to do it twice. I'm very grateful for that.

On my next appointment there, another close friend will drive. It seems both hospitals are ordering a lot of oddball tests and taking their time. I believe that the longer they are taking, the less dire my problems may be. As I learned with a malignant melanoma, the sooner they want to whisk you into the operating room, the worse it is.

I drove myself to the closer hospital last week for what I was told was a stress test. Several nurses told me that: "stress test." Seems they left out the most important word in front: "nuclear." I won't go into the details, which included being shot up with radioactive isotopes several times. I had a bad reaction to the last one and was afraid I was paralyzed

for a short while. But, another shot from another radiology tech had me feeling better in 10 minutes.

Believe me: If a nurse says you need a stress test, ask up front if it's nuclear. The nurses were great, but the other stuff? Not so much. It's a wonder I'm not glowing in the dark.

The next thing I need is an MRI, and to meet the cardiac surgeon. True to the sardonic nature of things, it was scheduled for my birthday. Bah!

Could there be a worse way to "celebrate" one's birthday? I think not! I'll have to wait until some later date to try to do that.

This situation is rather depressing. I am filled with anxiety much of the time. People tell me, "don't worry," but really, wouldn't you? Fortunately, every couple of days, I get a colorful envelope in the mail with an encouraging letter from a reader. One even sent me a felted butterfly to cheer me up. Thanks! I also heard again from my old writing pal, Mable Simmons. It's always cheering to hear from Mable. Several writers had heart-horror tales to tell of their own. It made me feel that I am perhaps better off than I might think.

So, here's how I've decided to approach it: Don't worry so much. Everything will be done — scary while it's happening, but curative in the end. I will try to be positive. I will focus on being out there tramping along the lane, looking for wildlife, by the time spring gets here. I will get through it! I am determined! ●

To order a copy of Margo's "A Party of One," call 540-468-2147 Mon.-Wed., 9 a.m.-5 p.m., or email therecorderoffice@gmail.com.



WHEREZIT?

Look for the CL logo, like the one above, in the pages of this issue of *Cooperative Living*. Submit the page number where you found it, along with your name, email and phone number to Wherezit, c/o *Cooperative Living*, P.O. Box 2340, Glen Allen, VA 23058-2340 or go online at co-opliving.com under "Contests." Deadline is March 20. The winner will receive a \$25 Amazon email gift card.



Curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.

— Walt Disney

Easter Brunch Made Easy

Preparing a midday holiday meal makes things festive and fun

Story courtesy of Family Features

PHOTO COURTESY GETTY IMAGES



Gathering friends and family together on Easter Sunday for a midday meal doesn't need to be fancy. With its prime positioning between breakfast and lunch, an Easter brunch is a more casual and lighter alternative to the typical holiday dinner party.

When charged with hosting a holiday midday gathering, a little pre-planning can go a long way toward ensuring your family get-together is as simple as it is scrumptious.

Get creative with decor. When prepping your Easter tablescape, think outside the box. Opt for unexpected serving dishes such as tartlet tins and vases, and transfer syrups and jams from their everyday containers to glass bowls or creamers. Fresh flowers and produce can add natural pops of color to the table, and a bowl of fruit can make for an eye-catching centerpiece.

Plan a variety of dishes. Make sure you have a mix of both sweet and savory dishes on the menu that can please a wide variety of palates. Earmarking some recipes that can be made ahead, like pastries and casseroles, can be a simple way to avoid waking up extra early to prepare. Save the morning of your event for dishes that are best served fresh, like this herbed Spanish omelet, which features potatoes; fresh, spring herbs; and red onions, and packs protein, B-vitamins and cancer-protective phytochemicals.

Serve it buffet-style. Setting your spread out on the counter and allowing guests to help themselves not only makes it easier for the host to mingle, but it allows guests to customize their meals as they wish and gives the gathering a more casual vibe. Try themed stations, such as a coffee or mimosa bar, parfait bar or bread bar, in addition to more traditional dishes to let guests take the customization to the next level. ●



Herbed Spanish Omelet

Servings: 8

Ingredients:

2 lbs. potatoes, peeled and diced or shredded
4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 cup diced red onion
4 cloves garlic, minced
8 large whole eggs, lightly beaten
4 egg whites, lightly beaten
4 tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley
4 tablespoons finely chopped fresh basil
4 tablespoons finely chopped fresh chives
salt, to taste (optional)
fresh herb sprigs, for garnish (optional)

Directions:

Place potatoes in large pan. Cover with water. Bring to boil and cook, uncovered, 3 minutes. Remove from heat. Cover and let stand about 10 minutes, or until potatoes are tender. Drain well. In deep, 10-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat, heat oil. Add onion and garlic. Cook about 8 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add potatoes and cook 5-10 minutes. Combine whole eggs and egg whites. Stir in parsley, basil and chives. Season with salt, if desired. Pour mixture over potatoes in hot skillet. Reduce heat and cook, uncovered, about 10-15 minutes, or until bottom of omelet is golden. If desired, brown top using toaster oven or broiler. Garnish with fresh herb sprigs, if desired.

Nutritional information per serving:

260 calories; 12 g total fat (2 g saturated fat); 28 g carbohydrates; 11 g protein; 2 g dietary fiber; 106 mg sodium.



BUSINESS

FIREARM-RIGHTS RESTORATION. Call for free consultation: Attorney John Janson at 434-953-8794 (Virginia Bar #91236).

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FREE

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AUCTIONS

BENSON DOWNSIZING AUCTION. Soapstone Road, Amelia, Va. Online auction features a lifelong collection of war collectibles, vintage coffee grinders, antiques, furniture, and tools. On-site preview – March 7, 5-7 p.m. Auction pickup – March 8, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

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DEADLINE: March 5 for April issue; Publisher reserves the right to designate classification or reject any ad. No personals, please.

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- (2) fax: 202-690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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Geothermal Energy

A hot topic that's also a cool conversation

by Will Lange, Contributing Columnist

In a world of traditional, fossil fuel-based heating and cooling systems, solar panels on roofs and vast wind farms, you may never have given much thought to another renewable: geothermal heat pumps.

These “geo” heat pumps aren’t flashy, or even noticeable to your neighbors. There are no telltale changes to your roof or your driveway; they quietly operate underground through water pipes, always hard at work heating and cooling homes across the country and around the world.

But why would a co-op member take the time and effort to invest in a geo system for their home?

Most importantly, geo systems reduce homeowner heating and cooling costs by more than 50%. If you research “geothermal savings calculator” your results will take you to several calculators that will show your home’s potential savings. Try a few and see for yourself.

Another important reason to “go geo” is that the systems are all electric. This can eliminate the need to buy propane or have a gas line in your home. Because modern geo systems



PHOTOS COURTESY WILL LANGE

typically provide “free hot water” from compressor heat, they pair perfectly with modern heat pump water heaters. These steps will lower expenses with fewer bills as you transition your home to all electric.

While 100% of the energy that goes into a geo system is electric, about 75% of the heating and cooling energy coming out is renewable energy from the earth. Sure, it may take \$50 a month to operate a geo heat pump, but the total output — with the ground energy — is four times that much.

And the best part is a geo heat pump should be unaffected by cold

snaps or heat waves. With the outdoor compressor unit gone, these systems can operate uninterrupted in any weather. In fact, the underground piping will last over 100 years, while the indoor system should last 25-30 years.

Realizing geo heat pumps are both renewable energy systems and expensive to install, the IRS is providing 30% tax credits to qualified homeowners through 2032. If your geo system costs \$30,000, you may be eligible for a \$9,000 reduction in your tax bill that can be spread out over multiple years. In some areas there are additional state tax credits and other incentives, the member services experts at your co-op may be able to help you navigate these incentives. ●



A geothermal unit easily integrates into your current heating and cooling system.

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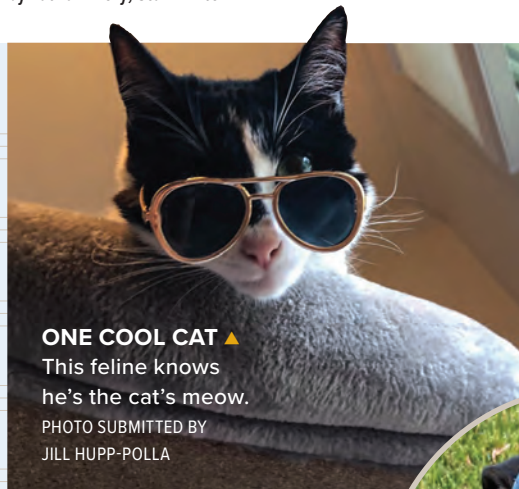
by Laura Emery, Staff Writer

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JILL HUPP-POLLA

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Eddie scouts his surroundings.

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IT'S FIVE O'CLOCK SOMEWHERE ▶

Minnie is searching for her lost shaker of salt.

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