

NOVEC *Cooperative* **Living**

A MISSION OF LIGHT

PAGE 10

Denny Crockett of A&N Electric Cooperative atop a utility pole in Guatemala

PHOTO BY JOHN JOHNSTON, SOUTHERN MARYLAND ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

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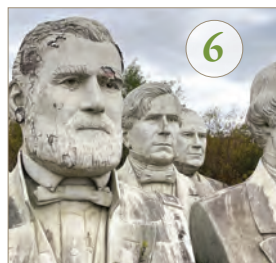
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THE RESPLENDENT QUETZAL IS THE NATIONAL BIRD OF GUATEMALA AND APPEARS ON ITS FLAG. IT REPRESENTS FREEDOM AND LIBERTY OF THE NATION.



VIEWPOINT

Touching Lives

I hope everyone made it through all the gift-giving, family gatherings, football games, and food selections that come with the holiday season. For me, that leads to my New Year's resolutions, which usually include exercise and eating healthier to recover from the past two months. This time of year is always exciting as we get a fresh start and look toward all the opportunities ahead of us in 2024.

One of the primary objectives of electric cooperatives is to do whatever it takes to safely keep the lights on for its members. Our VMDAEC cooperatives recently had an opportunity to take that objective to Guatemala, where they were able to bring electricity to a village of 500 people for the first time. Our



cover story this month goes over that incredible adventure and how it touched the lives of those villagers, along with the 19 volunteers who were able to participate. In typical cooperative fashion, we had more volunteers than we had available spots, as everyone wanted to help.

In this issue, we also have access to our 2024 online Legislative Guides, where you can find information about your state and federal legislators.

I want to wish everyone a happy and healthy New Year. We are blessed to be able to bring you this publication, and we look forward to bringing readers more interesting and exciting content in 2024. ●

Brian S. Mosier, President & CEO
Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives

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OUR MISSION

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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Take My Hand

Maryland museum highlights the life of Harriet Tubman

THE HARRIET TUBMAN ORGANIZATION INC. IN CAMBRIDGE, MD., is one of the oldest community organizations dedicated to the memory of Harriet Tubman, who was born in nearby Bucktown. Both localities lie within Dorchester County, Md.

Founded in the mid-1980s, the organization is continually dedicated to preserving Tubman's connection to the local community and to helping young people see Tubman as a role model. Over the past three decades, its efforts have included memorials to Tubman, tours to significant sites associated with her life by way of the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Scenic Byway, educational programming, celebrations, community outreach, and museum exhibits at the Harriet Tubman Museum & Educational Center.

The exterior of the museum building features a powerful and moving mural of Harriet Tubman beckoning viewers to take her hand — representing a first symbolic step toward freedom. The mural was completed in 2019 and has attracted attention from around the country ever since. “Michael Rosato’s 2019 mural did a lot to bring attention to the museum and draw visitors from near and far,” says photographer Jill Jasuta. “I was happy to capture photos of his powerful artwork to help spread the word.”

The museum hosts numerous programs throughout the year and its members have inspired community action and encouraged interpretation and research into Tubman's life and legacy. “I endeavor to carry on the legacy of Harriet Tubman by connecting history, music and arts in a way that reaches our inner being and changes lives,” says Linda Harris, director of events and programming for the museum.

Inside, visitors will find exhibits and a plethora of historic resources. Volunteer members of the organization are highly skilled in answering questions and providing information on Harriet Tubman and the region. Step-on guided tours of area sites associated with Harriet Tubman are available by appointment. The museum also has a gift shop and provides literature about other area attractions. ●

► For more information and hours of operation, visit harriettubmanmuseumcenter.org.

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Shining Light on Opportunity

by Jim Robertson, Staff Writer

Electric co-ops introduce young women to energy careers

Young women throughout Virginia challenged their determination to reach new heights at this year's Girl Power Camp, hosted by the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives, its member cooperatives and generous industry partners. On Nov. 3, nearly 80 determined young women from across the commonwealth attended the third annual event at the Association's state-of-the-art training facility in Palmyra, Va., for an interactive experience introducing them to a variety of career paths in the energy industry, including that of a lineworker.

The one-day energy career experience is intended for high school girls interested in or curious about working on a line crew, in a substation, as a drone operator, with advanced metering technology, or as a fiber broadband technician. Industry professionals led students through eight half-hour sessions as they climbed poles, operated a bucket truck, used a hotline stick, piloted drones, and tied wire while wearing rubber gloves used by lineworkers. They also learned about fiber splicing, interview and job searching best practices, and how to manage their finances.

Staff from S&N Communications cooked and served lunch, during which system operators Debbie Campbell and Corina Daw from Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative led a lunchtime discussion about career paths and opportunities within the cooperative industry. Other women in energy followed with their individual experiences.

Several students were also able to sharpen their public-speaking skills while being interviewed on camera with reporters from CBS 19 and NBC 29 out of Charlottesville. Entry-level operations roles can often lead to a variety of other opportunities within an organization, including leadership roles. Electric cooperatives and their industry partners are committed to attracting more young women to these types of roles.

"Young girls are becoming courageous and taking on careers like electricians and pipefitters and welders and enjoying them, because not everybody is college bound," says Kristina Farnham, building trades instructor at Rappahannock County High School. "It's nice to have an alternative that pays well." A former union pipefitter, Farnham also participated in the event alongside her students.



Determined to become a lineworker, Warren County High School senior Dehlilaray Roop returned for her second Girl Power Camp this year.

School administrators describe the event as a great example of how community partnerships can help expand learning beyond the classroom walls and help students discover the diverse career opportunities available to them.

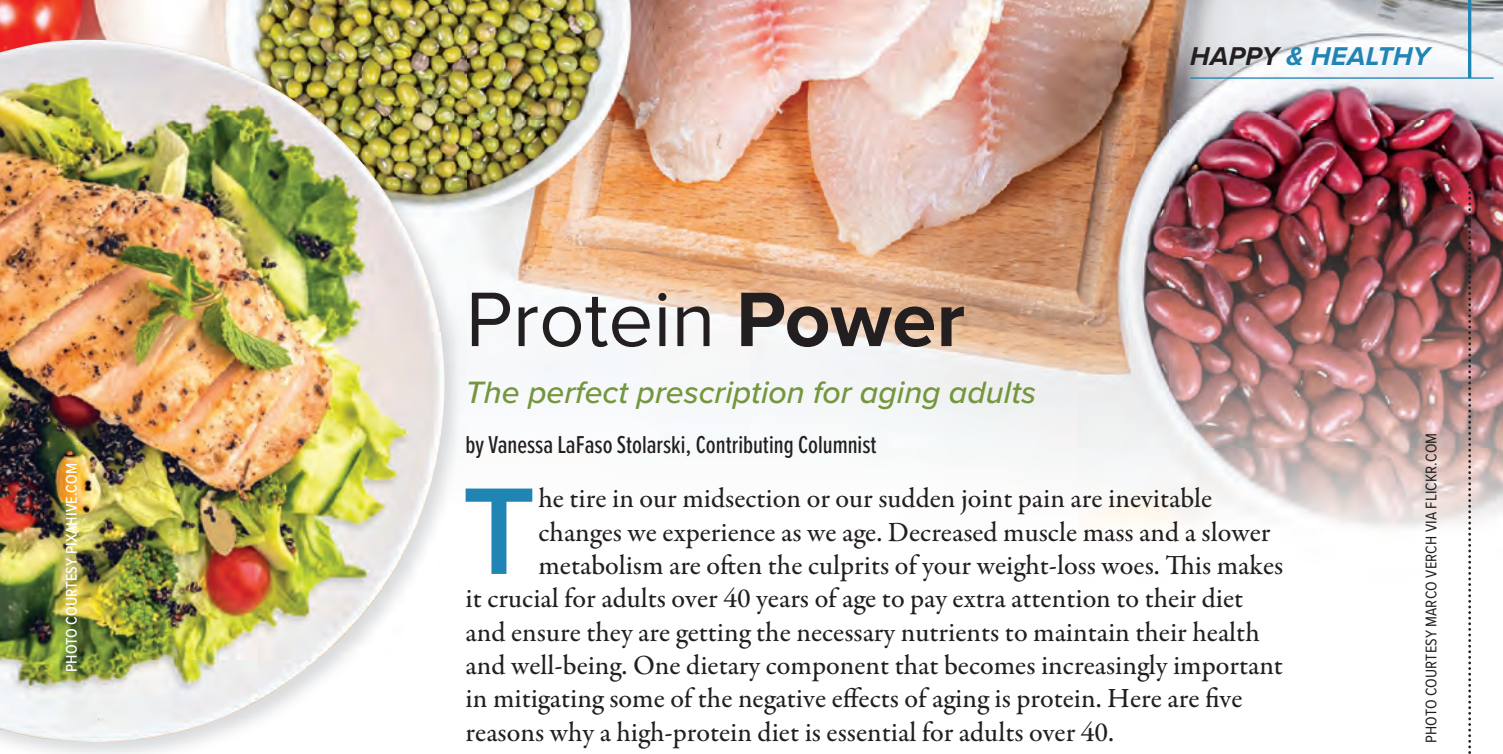
COOPERATION AMONG COOPERATIVES ... AND OTHERS

One unique characteristic of Girl Power is the cooperation and teamwork among 10 electric cooperatives, along with several industry partners, working together to promote and execute the event. Co-op professionals led discussions about job interviewing, managing finances, helped students put on gear and climb poles, served as media contacts, provided hard hats, and more.

"We are able to illustrate to young women that cooperatives are an amazing place to work," says Melissa Gay, vice president of communications and member services at Central Virginia Electric Cooperative. "They have great benefits, and it's like working for your family. And young women are welcome there."

Several partners helped make this event possible, including Milwaukee Tool, Altec, Bradley Electro, Utility Sales Associates, S&N Communications, Sentinel Robotic Solutions, Bulwark, Utility Service Agency, Lekson Associates, Utilities Employees Credit Union and Dominion Energy. ●

► For more, visit vmdaec.com/powerfulcareers.



Protein Power

The perfect prescription for aging adults

by Vanessa LaFaso Stolarski, Contributing Columnist

The tire in our midsection or our sudden joint pain are inevitable changes we experience as we age. Decreased muscle mass and a slower metabolism are often the culprits of your weight-loss woes. This makes it crucial for adults over 40 years of age to pay extra attention to their diet and ensure they are getting the necessary nutrients to maintain their health and well-being. One dietary component that becomes increasingly important in mitigating some of the negative effects of aging is protein. Here are five reasons why a high-protein diet is essential for adults over 40.

1. MUSCLE MASS PRESERVATION:

One of the most significant changes that occurs with age is the loss of muscle mass, known as sarcopenia. This can lead to decreased strength, mobility, and an increased risk of falls and fractures. Consuming an adequate amount of protein can help preserve muscle mass and prevent or slow down the progression of sarcopenia. Protein provides the necessary building blocks for muscle repair and growth, making it crucial for maintaining strength and mobility.

2. ENHANCED BONE

HEALTH: Osteoporosis, a condition characterized by weak and brittle bones, becomes more prevalent as we age. Protein plays a vital role in maintaining bone health by aiding in the absorption of calcium and other essential minerals. A high-protein diet can help reduce the risk of fractures and improve overall bone density, ensuring better skeletal health in older adults.

3. WEIGHT MANAGEMENT:

As metabolism slows down with age, weight management becomes more challenging. Protein has been shown to increase satiety and reduce appetite, making it an excellent tool for weight management. By including protein-rich foods in their diet, adults over 40 can feel fuller for longer and reduce the likelihood of overeating or snacking on unhealthy foods. Additionally, protein requires more energy to digest, which can slightly boost metabolism and aid in weight loss or maintenance.

4. IMPROVED IMMUNE FUNCTION: A strong immune system is crucial for overall health, especially in older adults who may be more susceptible to infections and illnesses. Protein plays a vital role in the production of antibodies and immune cells, helping to strengthen the immune system. Consuming a high-protein diet supports immune function and reduces the risk of infections and diseases.

5. ENHANCED WOUND HEALING: As we age, the body's ability to heal wounds and injuries slows down. Protein is essential for tissue repair and regeneration, making it crucial for wound healing. By ensuring an adequate protein intake, older adults can promote faster healing and reduce the risk of complications from wounds or surgeries.

IN SUMMARY

Include more protein-rich foods with each meal, such as lean meats, fish, eggs and dairy products. Aim to eat a portion of protein every time you eat. Also important is understanding that while some foods are protein sources, they may not contain enough for a sufficient portion. Nuts, for instance, while containing a small amount of protein, are a predominantly fat-based food, which has a much higher caloric value at 9 calories per gram versus protein, which is 4 calories per gram.

However, it is essential to consult with a healthcare professional or registered dietitian to determine the appropriate protein intake based on individual needs and any existing health conditions. ●

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

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Preserving the Heads of State

by Amanda S. Creasey, Outdoors Writer

Abandoned presidential statues have a bright future in Williamsburg

When people think of Williamsburg, Va., outlet shopping and Colonial history are likely what come to mind. What might not be at the forefront of most people's thoughts is Presidents Park, a long-closed sculpture park featuring larger-than-life busts of 42 U.S. presidents. When the park closed roughly a decade ago, Howard Hankins was hired to remove and dispose of the nearly four dozen 18- to 20-foot-tall presidential busts.

Engineering a way to transport the massive sculptures, each weighing over 10 tons, was no simple feat. Ultimately, Hankins achieved the task by "putting a hole in the top of the head of each one so he could lift them up and load them on trailers," says Mark M. Jakobowski, president of Pathmark Consulting and Design, and director of development

and planning for a project that is in the planning phase to provide a home for the sculptures.

Hankins then decided to preserve the presidential busts, transporting them to his ancestral farmland in Williamsburg. According to Jakobowski, ownership of the land dates back to the 17th century and was a land grant from a British king. Ironically, 42 U.S. president busts now reside on the remaining 300-acre parcel.

STOIC SENTINELS

Although Presidents Park is closed, the busts are accessible to visitors in their location on Hankins' property a few select times a year. Those who wish to see them, as they currently sit in a state of semi-decay just across a mulch pile

from heavy equipment, must purchase tickets in advance for a set date and time.

I arrived at the site with my two dogs and a friend on a cloudy Saturday afternoon. We pulled onto the property and down a long, dusty gravel drive, past an old family home, dating back to the 1700s, where a woman directing traffic pointed to a parking area bounded by cranes, bulldozers and dump trucks.

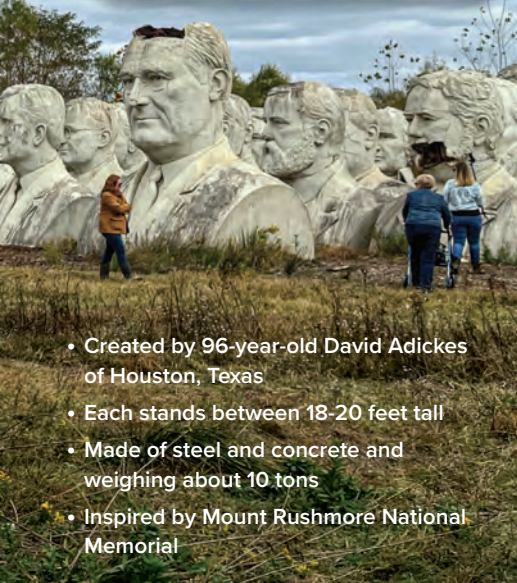
We stepped out into the dusty lot and walked across the drive, passing a food and beverage tent on our way to check in. I purchased a hot apple cider and sipped it beneath the stoic stone stare of the bust of Abraham Lincoln, a rather grotesque hole in the back of its head.

While the Kintsugi nature of the busts inspires the imagination and strikes a certain mood of awe and wonder, future plans for the busts include at least a partial restoration. "Some people think part of the beauty is that they are falling



PHOTOS BY AMANDA S. CREASEY





- Created by 96-year-old David Adickes of Houston, Texas
- Each stands between 18-20 feet tall
- Made of steel and concrete and weighing about 10 tons
- Inspired by Mount Rushmore National Memorial

apart. We aren't going to restore them to brand new, but they are going to have restoration. They are going to be treated in a way that will preserve them as long as possible," Jakobowski explains.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Visitors to the current site can see not only the busts themselves, but also some of the old signage originally displayed at Presidents Park, including information about each of the president's terms and personal lives, as well as information about their respective sculptors.

My dogs, my friend and I wandered amongst the busts in their current state of disrepair and decay, musing on the Ozymandian nature of mankind. We admired the painstaking effort at detail, once at risk of total destruction. Every president's tie, for example, is unique, right down to the little elephants marching across George W. Bush's.



The strands of each bust's hair, textured. Wire-rimmed spectacles perfectly perched on noses. Eye light realistic in every eye.

These sculptures, though currently in ruins, have a bright future planned for them. According to Jakobowski, the sculptures will be relocated to "one of the nice overlooks on the current property." The plans will address the desire to minimize land disturbance. "The sculptures will sit on synthetic turf, and paver paths will be installed over a permeable surface to manage stormwater on the site," he says.

During our own visit, we were grateful we wore appropriate footwear because, despite dry conditions, the busts have been slowly sinking into the earth under their own weight, ground water puddling at their bases and muddying the path, in spite of efforts to fill in the depressions with mulch. The plans aim for zero runoff and no need for irrigation. Jakobowski explained this low-maintenance setup will help protect and preserve the sculptures. Synthetic turf doesn't require mowing or watering, avoiding green stains from grass, damage from lawn equipment and possible discoloration from watering.

POLITICAL POSTERITY

Future plans are to create an open-air museum to display the sculptures. "We will provide items and stories



relevant to the [American] Revolution. The story of the farm will be posted along with information about the creator of the sculptures in Houston, Texas, and maybe the restoration process," Jakobowski says. "It will be a true museum that culminates in your walking through the presidential sculptures."

Jakobowski envisions that visitors to the future museum will be able to access historical information audibly, perhaps using Wi-Fi. "If you take your cellphone and walk up to George Washington, you'll hear an actor communicating what Washington thinks about some of his accomplishments," he says.

The vision for the presidential busts is almost as grand as the busts

"They are going to be treated in a way that will preserve them as long as possible."

— Mark M. Jakobowski,
president of Pathmark
Consulting and Design

themselves. There's no doubt in Jakobowski's mind that they deserve their place in history. "You're in the triangle of history here and you're on historical land," he says. "We would like to see the sculptures be part of the whole historical

circuit of Williamsburg, Yorktown and Jamestown, to be a regional, if not a national attraction."

At the close of our time with the sculptures, my friend and I pile into my car with my dogs. I watch sadly as the dilapidated gray busts diminish in my rearview mirror, but I'm also smiling, knowing that their future is promising. ●

What's Old is New Again

by Laura Emery, Staff Writer

Revitalization of historic inn is an important project for Virginia's smallest county

“It was the heartbeat of the community,” Betty Mitchell, executive director of the Blue Grass Resource Center, explains. “And we are excited to have it beating once again.”

She’s referring to the once-bustling Highland Inn, located in Monterey, the county seat of Highland County, Va.

Built in 1904 by Silas W. Crummett, a local businessman, the inn was known as Hotel Monterey for its first 75 years. The Queen Anne-style building features two levels of Eastlake-style porches with 18 guest rooms and suites. Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone and John Philip Sousa, among other notable historical figures, have visited the grand three-story structure in the past.

The Highland Inn is a historical gem currently in the process of being renovated and revitalized. It’s the oldest, largest and most historic lodging establishment in Highland County. It’s both listed on the National Register of Historic Places and as a Virginia Historic Landmark.

The much-beloved inn closed its doors in 2019 when frozen pipes led to water damage that was costly to repair. That’s when Blue Grass Resource Center purchased the property. BGRC is a private nonprofit organization with a mission to enhance the quality of life for Highland County residents through historic preservation and educational programs.



“It’s been a pleasure working with SVEC. They’ve been really good community partners.”

— Betty Mitchell, executive director, Blue Grass Resource Center

“The Highland Inn is such an iconic building in the county. We thought we could step in, as a nonprofit, and purchase it, renovate it, and then lease it to an operator that is experienced in running a hospitality facility,” Mitchell, a Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative member, explains.

Says BGRC Board Vice Chairman and former *Cooperative Living* Editor Richard Johnstone, “This is truly an economic development project in the very best sense, because the inn serves as an economic engine for the entire county, which is heavily reliant on tourism.”

Partial funding for the inn’s renovation has been made possible by grants from the Virginia Department of Housing

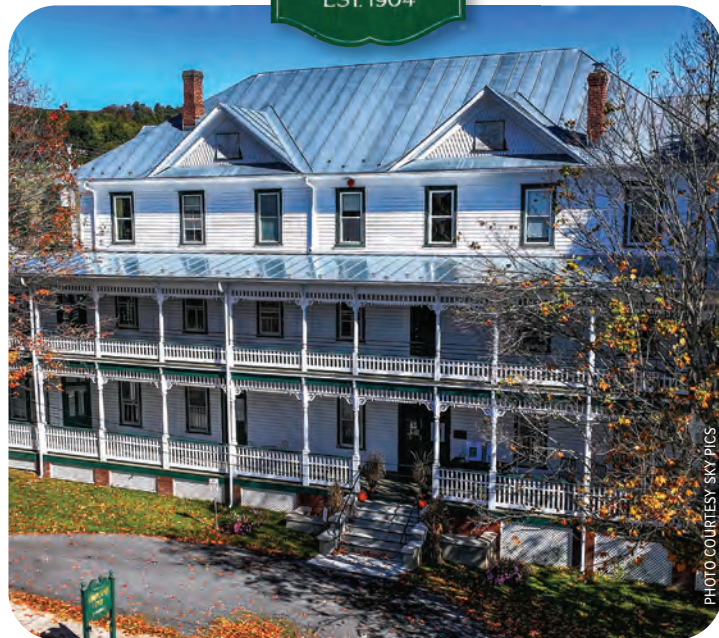


PHOTO COURTESY SKY PICS

and Community Development, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and Virginia Economic Development Partnership as well as many generous private donors.

It will be renovated and open again as an 18-room inn with two ADA-accessible rooms on the first floor. It will have a dining room and a tavern, and much larger outdoor seating for diners. Mitchell says that it will be like walking into a “new old building,” steeped in history but with modern conveniences.

With the first phase of the renovation project completed in 2021, Mitchell says the end is in sight. “We’re waiting for enough funding to complete phase two of the project,” she explains. “We have a \$5.2 million goal to finish the revitalization project, with current commitments of \$2 million. We also have two large grants pending for \$2.5 million, plus \$812,000 pending through a congressionally directed spending bill.”

With just over 2,200 residents, Highland is Virginia’s least-populous county, and one of the few fully served by electric cooperatives. About half the county is served by BARC Electric Cooperative and half by Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative. Mitchell says it’s been a pleasure working with SVEC, which provides electrical power to the Highland Inn. “They’ve been really easy to work with. They had a lot of good ideas on how to bring three-phase power to the facility. They’ve been really good community partners.” ●

► For more information, including ways to help, visit highlandinnrenovation.org.



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LIVES CHANGED *Forever*

by Jim Robertson, Staff Writer

Lineworkers utilize resilience and determination, turn darkness into light in Guatemala



“People are resilient. Where there’s a will, there’s a way,” says Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative line technician Mauricio Paz, part of the 19-person team from 10 electric co-ops in Virginia and Maryland that traveled to Guatemala in October.

For the past 60 years, lineworkers and others from America’s electric cooperatives have volunteered to participate in mission trips around the globe to improve quality of life through the gift of electricity, thanks to coordination efforts by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association — NRECA International. The destination of this year’s United We Light trip was Santa Isabel in the Ixcán region of Guatemala, just miles from the southern border of Mexico. The goal was to construct more than 5 miles of line, install six transformers, and connect 103 homes, businesses and a school with electric service, forever changing 500 lives. Poles had been set along the rugged dirt road by the local municipal utility, Empresa Municipal Rural de Electricidad, which also assisted with the project completion.

Santa Isabel had been waiting for power for about 15 years, according to United We Light trip coordinator J.T. Jacobs, safety training manager for the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives. After a dirt road into town was created — the first of its kind in the area — it finally became possible. Because it is made of dirt, however, the road is



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negatively affected by water and becomes filled with ruts and mud pits following the rainy season.

ADAPTING TO THE TROPICS

October generally marks the end of the rainy season, but wet and humid conditions prevailed for a good part of the 19-day expedition. Political protests throughout the region also delayed and occasionally interrupted travel to and from the project site, which was about an hour or so from the team's accommodations. Temperatures over 100 degrees with high humidity added to the already less-than-ideal working conditions.

Hydration was critical. "The heat

"I drank more water on this trip than I've drank in a year." After the first day or so, the team learned to better pace themselves, taking breaks in the shade and making sure to stay hydrated.

Several team members echoed Meade's description of the type of heat as something they hadn't experienced before. "The heat's definitely different down here," says Jared Stern, Meade's coworker at SMECO. Luke Swanson of Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative described it as "suffocating."

Because the new road to and from the site was in such rough condition, it caused trucks to become stuck in the mud. Thankfully, some villagers witnessed this and didn't hesitate to take action. "The next day, they were carrying rocks [in potato sacks] a pretty good distance," says Addison Spicer of Rappahannock Electric Cooperative. They filled in the holes with the rocks, assisting with traction. "It shows how committed they were to helping us help them."

STEPPING BACK IN TIME

Compared to American standards, residents of Santa Isabel live a simple life, to say the least. "It's like stepping back 100 years in time," says Allan Thacker of Central Virginia Electric Cooperative. Children mostly ran around barefooted with minimal clothing. Homes consisted of small one-room huts with dirt floors, a table, and sometimes a wooden bed.

After arriving in Guatemala City by air, the VMDAEC team headed north to spend the night in Cobán. Their destination was the city of Playa Grande, where they lodged for two weeks during their mission to electrify nearby Santa Isabel. Occasional protest blockades hampered their travel both to and from the area. On their way home, they avoided the southern blockade by taking a long "midnight" detour, driving through the night to return to Guatemala City.

was exhausting," says John Meade from Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative.

"It's like stepping back 100 years in time."

— Allan Thacker, Central Virginia Electric Cooperative

Food is cooked in pots over open flames throughout the day, making indoor temperatures even hotter by 15-20 degrees.

"It's definitely as primitive as it gets," says Scott Geovannello of Southside Electric Cooperative. "One thing that caught me by surprise is how happy the people are here." SVEC's Tim Wright also describes the villagers as some of the "happiest" people he's ever been around.

Many homes utilize small solar panels on their roofs to power a single lightbulb or charge one cellphone or radio. At the local schoolhouse was a pole-mounted solar panel connected to several electrical outlets, including one for a public address system. On it each morning, a village official announced the arrival of the lineworker team and occasionally asked residents to assist with the work.

Every member of the team commented about the happiness they witnessed in the village, despite the lack of running water, air conditioning, bathrooms or other modern conveniences taken for granted back home. "People were joyful down here," explains Casey Butler of Choptank Electric Cooperative. "It's not just happiness. Happiness is based on conditions, but joy is something you

(continued on page 12)



Utilizing old-school linework techniques as villagers look on.

Lives Changed Forever

(continued from page 11)

choose every day — to be joyful. I won't take things for granted anymore; [I'll] just be grateful for what I have back home."

Knowing where they were going, the team was prepared to not have the luxury of the type of motorized equipment used at home to perform similar tasks, much like utility crews in the U.S. during the early 1900s. They did use some modern gear from home while climbing utility poles, which usually attracted an audience. The local Empresa Municipal Rural de Electricidad crews climb with ropes, and trained the American co-op line technicians in their methods. Some took to it well.



KIDS ARE KIDS

One highlight experienced by the entire team was positive interaction with the village children. Even with a language barrier, the two groups found ways to communicate and laugh together. At one point, Mark Bandy of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative removed his hat to cool off and spontaneously said "woo." One of the children immediately responded by copying him with his own "woo." Soon, the children all began shouting "woo-woo" as a form of greeting whenever they saw members of the team.

"The kids really touched my heart," admits Drew Leake of Rappahannock Electric Cooperative.

"Kids are kids," says MEC's Jason Holley, who found creative ways to play with the children and have fun without toys. The team taught the kids new games using empty water bottles and other items. Thanks to the generosity of a Central Virginia church, the children were delighted to receive several toy dolls and soccer balls. NOVEC's Mauricio Paz was popular with the young audience. In addition to speaking Spanish, he brought snacks and candy from home to share with them.

Some team members also took time to educate the children about electrical safety. With service lines hanging lower than normal, both local children and adults needed to understand the potential danger of making contact with, or hanging clothes to dry, on the lines.

CHALLENGES

From protests and rough roads to extreme heat and humidity, 19 individuals came together and formed one team determined to complete a mission. They overcame every obstacle faced, such as fuel shortages, flat tires, aggressive motorcyclists and encounters with armed security guards. Shortly after arriving in Guatemala City, the team sat for hours at a roadblock. Protestors had blocked access to a bridge that led into Playa Grande, where the team was scheduled to stay during the trip. Just as they were ready to call it quits and turn around, traffic began moving. "The good Lord was looking out for us," says J.T. Jacobs, who believes they were meant to be there.

Additionally, the team had doubts in their ability to complete the project when the meters being shipped there were stuck in another part of the country due to road blockades. They were then faced with a choice: Leave the materials for the local EMRE crew or risk being stuck in Playa Grande for an unknown amount of time. With collective resilience and determination to finish



"One thing that caught me by surprise is how happy the people are here."

— Tim Wright, Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative

what they started, the team mutually agreed to see the project through. Fortunately, the shipment of meters arrived on the morning of Oct. 15, allowing the team to complete their mission.

"It's the hardest thing I've put myself through," admits Scott Geovannello, "but I'm very grateful I decided to go on this journey."

The local EMRE crew was critical to the project's success. "They're some of the hardest-working people I've seen," says Thacker. EMRE personnel also ensured the team had good nutrition throughout their stay.

Northern Neck Electric Cooperative line technician, and the first-ever female crew member to participate in an NRECA International trip, Gena Boarman expected conditions to be worse, but admits she struggled with the language barrier and trying to communicate with villagers and local crews. "I don't speak any Spanish whatsoever," she says.

Addison Spicer adds, "Everyone does things a little different, but at the end, we all achieve the same goal."

LIVES CHANGED

Following completion of the work, EMRE representatives and Santa Isabel residents held a ceremony celebrating the historic event and thanking the United We Light team that changed their lives forever. But their lives were not the only ones affected. "It's been fun. It's been humbling. It's been challenging," says NOVEC line technician Mauricio Paz.

"I'm really grateful for the opportunity," says REC's Drew Leake.



"It's, hands down, the best thing I've ever done."

NOVEC's Blake Sparling learned a valuable life lesson on the trip. "You don't need things to have fun and be happy," he says.

Choptank Electric Cooperative line technician Casey Butler says he'll be more grateful for what he has at home and won't take things for granted anymore. The entire team agrees that neither photos nor videos will accurately describe the experience. "You need to feel it, not just see it," explains SVEC's Luke Swanson.

J.T. Jacobs was told by a villager that electricity coming to the village makes people stay in Santa Isabel. It helps families remain together and in their hometown. "It's more than turning the light on," he says. "It's making dreams come true." ●



The team enjoyed teaching the kids new games, including how to give high-fives.



John Johnston, communications and website specialist for Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative, accompanied the VMDAEC team to Guatemala as an embedded journalist.

The following is his written firsthand recollection of the trip:

Our first morning in Guatemala opened with a view of rainforest vegetation, but it wasn't until we reached Playa Grande, our base of operations, that I had a true sense of being in another nation. American stores and restaurants were few, with rare exceptions like the Domino's Pizza that delivered our dinner one evening. Street traffic was dominated by motorcycles, three-wheeled tuk-tuks, and pickup trucks that were suited to the rough rural roads I would come to know well.

Playa Grande still did not prepare me for our work site in Santa Isabel. Five hundred Q'eqchi' Maya people live in a village with no running water and, until 11 days after we arrived, no electric service. Although Santa Isabel is only 30 miles from the larger town, the long and bumpy drive to and from the work site increased the feeling of remoteness. Like my teammates, I had to adjust to the

unseasonably hot and humid weather, learning to consume several bottles of water and sport drinks each day to stay hydrated.

The residents I met were friendly and welcoming, grateful to be getting electricity after waiting for 15 years. From an American perspective, they own very little. What they do have is a close bond as a community.

Each of us received intense curiosity from Santa Isabel's children. They gathered to watch the team members climb poles and install house wiring and eat lunch. The mid-Atlantic lineworkers were wonderful with the children, playing games with them and showing them photos on phones. When I launched a drone to record aerial video, the kids clustered around me as the controller's screen displayed their homes from high above. Helping to entertain the children was incredibly rewarding.

The Guatemala project put together lineworkers from different cooperatives with their professional colleagues from

Empresa Municipal Rural de Electricidad. Whether they were working hard in delivering electricity, or playing hard during soccer games and arm-wrestling matches, I saw a camaraderie that transcended utility and nationality.

On the last day of work, the EMRE team activated the fuse that electrified the newly installed lines. Santa Isabel's town center is in a shallow valley that is overlooked by houses on either direction of the road. When the electricity came on, I heard shouts and loud talk from both directions, and I saw the outside lights on the buildings lit for the first time. It was a tremendous feeling to help bring power to a community that has waited many years for it.

Along with that memory, I carried home an appreciation for the Guatemalans' hospitality — the NRECA International team that answered our questions and helped me with interviews, the EMRE team that provided our meals, and the Santa Isabel residents who welcomed us into their homes. ●

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NEW YEAR. NEW SAVINGS IN YOUR POCKET.

Dave Schleicher, NOVEC President and CEO

From all of us at NOVEC, Happy New Year! As NOVEC enters 2024, we're announcing several changes approved by your Board of Directors that will impact residential bills. I'll be sharing the details with you here, however, the most important detail is this: Effective immediately, the majority of our residential customers will see their bills decrease. The average customer will pay 19% less, a savings of more than \$30 per month!

NOVEC is adjusting three key components of your bill: the monthly service charge (a fixed amount to recover fixed costs such as billing, metering, vehicles, etc.), the distribution charge (which varies based on how much electricity you use), and the power cost adjustment (the PCA reconciles the wholesale price NOVEC pays for electricity and is passed along to customers at cost, in accordance with Virginia law).

NOVEC is lowering the distribution charge and raising the monthly service charge to more accurately recover fixed and variable costs. The net result of this rebalancing is revenue neutral, so these changes will not generate any additional money for NOVEC. The monthly service charge will increase by \$5.55 to \$21.30, while the distribution charge will correspondingly decrease.

Next, let's focus on the PCA. In 2024, our power supply team is projecting significantly lower electricity costs, and 100% of those savings go directly to you and your fellow customers. How much this affects you personally depends on how much electricity you use. The total bill reductions will be near 10% for small users and more than 20% for larger users.

I know all this is complicated, but I wanted to personally share the message; we take seriously our mission to deliver safe, reliable, and competitively priced energy.

Finally, for those high school seniors who are about to decide what they want to do after graduation, NOVEC offers various scholarships. Please visit our website to see how we might help you fulfill your potential.

Best Regards,

MAKE A
DONATION

Hands Engaged In Local Public Service

NOVEC HELPS' 5TH DAY OF CARING ASSISTS LOCAL NONPROFITS



NOVEC employees gathered in October for the fifth annual Day of Caring. Organized by NOVEC HELPS, the day of service is the culmination of months of planning, communicating, and delegating. About 40 employees pitched in to help at Western Fairfax Christian Ministries (WFCM) and Choice. Respect. independence. (CRi) in Manassas.

NOVEC HELPS Chair Nan Musick said that they chose to assist two organizations this year because so many wanted to give their time. NOVEC employees got right to work cleaning, painting, sorting and packing food, washing vehicles, and helping out with yard work needs across both locations. One team even did a little baking, which was a nice surprise for CRi residents.

"CRi and WFCM kept our workers busy," said Musick.

Yvette Perez and Brigette Adkins (right) freshen up shutters at CRi.

"The volunteer service provided by NOVEC employees was invaluable as WFCM is in the midst of its busy season, including two holiday/school food distributions serving nearly 1,000 local families," said Diane Beatley, WFCM senior manager of community engagement. "We appreciate our long-standing partnership with NOVEC and NOVEC HELPS."

CRi offers personalized resources to people with developmental disabilities and mental health needs. For more than 45 years, CRi has provided these

individuals with specialized services, and home and community support.

With food pantries in Chantilly and Centreville, WFCM is a community-based human services organization in Fairfax County. Services include



NOVEC employees sort vegetables at Western Fairfax Christian Ministries.

providing food, emergency financial housing support via rent and utility assistance, laundry ministry, nutrition classes, connections to clothing, birthday cakes, financial classes, and health/vaccination clinics.

To donate to NOVEC HELPS, or to put in a request for assistance, visit novechelps.org, or email helps@novec.com.



Brittany Campbell makes a sign for the bedroom door of a CRI resident.



John Rainey paints the fence at the entrance of the CRI residence.

NOVEC HELPS SUMMARY | 2023

53

ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED

NOVEC HELPS donated to 53 nonprofit organizations in 2023, including Joshua's Hands, ARTFactory, and the Special Olympics.

\$54
THOUSAND

DOLLARS DONATED

Last year, NOVEC HELPS donated \$54,375 to food banks, charities, and other nonprofit organizations.

15

YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF NOVEC HELPS

NOVEC HELPS has been supporting the community for 15 years.

NOVEC HELPS, Hands Engaged in Local Public Service, is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization of NOVEC employees who volunteer their time to help others and engage other employees in community service projects. The NOVEC HELPS' board of directors votes on programs and events to support, whether with financial donations or with feet on the ground.

Learn more at novechelps.org. Follow HELPS on facebook.com/novechelps.



NOVEC JOINS AMERICAN CO-OP EFFORT TO BRING ELECTRICITY TO GUATEMALA

NOVEC lineworkers Blake Sparling and Mauricio Paz left the comfort and convenience of Northern Virginia in October to bring some comfort and convenience to the villagers of Santa Isabel, Guatemala.

They, along with 16 fellow lineworkers from Virginia and Maryland electric co-ops, were part of the United We Light effort, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) International initiative that brings electricity to rural communities around the world. The project was completed with support from NRECA and Empresa Municipal Rural de Electricidad (EMRE), an electric co-op in Guatemala.

Despite a myriad of challenges and obstacles, the lights are on for about 500 Santa Isabel residents for the first time ever. The team installed more than five miles of primary conductor, transformers, breaker boxes, wired lights, switches, and electrical boxes. They also added service connections to about 115 residences, including a school and church.

“Accessibility was tough,” said Sparling. “There are no real roads,” which led to broken-down trucks, flat tires, and vehicles that had to be rescued from the mud.



Lineworkers Blake Sparling and Mauricio Paz (right) work to bring electricity to the residents of Santa Isabel, Guatemala.



Father of three Mauricio Paz enjoyed spending time with the children of Santa Isabel.

EMRE had erected the poles before the Americans arrived, but there were no bucket trucks to get lineworkers to the tops of the poles. “We had to climb every pole,” said Paz.

Sparling said they had to complete many of their tasks manually in humid conditions where the heat index reached 119 degrees. He said, “It was exhausting,” and it took several days to adapt to the environment.

Paz said it was great to work with the local lineworkers. “We knew the equipment by different names, and we couldn’t really communicate, but we figured it out. Everyone there had the same goal. We were all feeding off the same energy.”

After some delays, the group finally got started on Oct. 5 and worked quickly to make up for lost time. That first day, crews installed a few spans of primary wire, they framed and laid out secondary poles, and they marked some homes for wiring.

While in Santa Isabel, Sparling and Paz interacted frequently with the villagers. The children in particular were curious about the men and their work, and Sparling, at 6 feet, 5 inches tall, was a giant to them. Paz wrote NOVEC in the mud on the side of the truck. When they told the kids what the word was, the children chanted “NOVEC! NOVEC!”

“It was a joy having the kids around,” said Paz, and he gladly shared any extra snacks with them. The lineworkers made a seesaw for the children and joined in a game of soccer. When the crew flew their drone, the children clustered around, eager to view the footage on the controller’s screen.

The residents of Santa Isabel helped the United We Light effort where they could. They carried cables, and brought the workers bags of peanuts, fruit, and coconuts to eat. Most speak a Mayan language — Q’equchi’.

Guatemalans who were objecting to presidential election results held some peaceful protests that caused repeated disruptions to the United We Light project. Paz described the adventure as equal parts humbling, emotional, and frustrating. “At times, it was a roller coaster. The uncertainty was the toughest, not knowing what would happen the next day.”



NOVEC lineworker Mauricio Paz said his experience in Guatemala with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association International initiative was both challenging and rewarding.



Mauricio Paz spells NOVEC in the mud of one of the trucks, much to the delight of the children of Santa Isabel.

“Everyone there had the same goal. We were all feeding off the same energy.”

- MAURICIO PAZ, NOVEC LINEWORKER



Blake Sparling takes a brief break from work in Santa Isabel.

NOVEC’s lineworkers made the most of their first few hours back home. Sparling said he immediately headed out to a comedy club in Washington. Paz said he was just grateful to get home to a good shower, and to kiss his wife and three kids.

Both men said they would be first in line to sign up for another United We Light experience if offered the chance. Paz said, “When we are able to restore power to people after a storm, those people are happy and grateful, but to be able to give power to folks who have never had it, that was totally different.”

PEACE OF MIND

NOVEC Solutions Protection Plans Help Homeowners be Prepared



Some surprises are joyous, like birthday parties. Others, like an emergency repair on a gas, water, or sewer line ... less joyous. Much, much less joyous.

Many homeowners don't even realize they are responsible for the lines that bring essential services into their homes. So when a pipe begins to leak — from age or years of wear and tear — the resulting inconvenience and price tag is especially unwelcome. Many basic homeowner insurance policies do not cover repairs to or replacement of certain major systems in and around your home. And local utility companies or municipalities are not responsible for repairs in your home or on your property.

NOVEC Solutions (novecsolutions.com) offers a wide variety of home repair and replacement protection plans, providing a convenient and affordable way to cover emergency home repairs. Customers can pick the plan that best fits their needs.

The most popular plans protect water service lines and sewer/septic lines, while other plans cover natural gas lines, electric lines, and electric-vehicle chargers.

Offerings also include coverage for heating and cooling systems, heat pumps, water heaters, interior plumbing and drainage systems, and surge-protection systems.

Most plans offered by NOVEC Solutions cost less than \$10 a month; cooling, heating, and plumbing

system coverage is slightly more. You can find the average cost of a specific repair (what it would be without a protection plan) by clicking on the “learn more” tab on each individual product offering at novecsolutions.com. For instance, the average cost of replacing a water service line is \$2,832, while the average cost of a sewer/septic line is listed as \$5,754. Replacing a water heater can cost about \$1,400.

Eligibility requirements, frequently asked questions, and detailed information on each coverage plan are

available under the “learn more” tab. You can also find information about how to place a service call, what specifically is covered, and what happens if a covered item cannot be repaired.

In 2022, NOVEC customers opened 4,231 new plans, double the

number of plans opened in 2021. In total, 18,852 customers are protected by nearly 33,000 plans (many customers choose multiple plans). Plan participants submitted more than 1,300 repair claims totaling \$932,000 in 2022. Customers have saved \$3.5 million since the program's inception in 2018.



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YOUTH TOUR 2024

*Applications due
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Feb. 16, 2024*

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Submit applications by visiting novec.com/youthtour.

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*Deadline:
March 1, 2024*

Public, private, and home-schooled high school seniors whose families receive electricity from NOVEC may apply for one of 15 \$1,500 higher-education scholarships.

Get more information by visiting novec.com/scholarships.



NOVEC Lineworkers Compete in International Lineman's Rodeo

It wasn't their first rodeo, but it was the biggest. Lineworkers Jeremy Jenkins and Johnny Lanzetta represented NOVEC in the October International Lineman's Rodeo in Kansas. Five different events tested their climbing abilities, equipment repair skills, and rescue techniques.



Victoria Taylor listens to her dad, Jesse Taylor, before taking a turn at pole climbing.

Linework May Be All in the Family for Taylors

One of the high school seniors who attended Girl Power had a leg up on the others. Victoria Taylor's dad, Jesse Taylor, is a construction supervisor at NOVEC and has had years of experience climbing electric poles.

Victoria, 17, is still considering her career options and said, "My dad signed me up" for Girl Power.

When it was time to choose a pole to climb, Victoria made a beeline for her father, who was helping out at the event. It was a good collaboration. They capitalized on their father-daughter bond, laughed a lot, and Victoria made solid progress up the pole.

Taylor said, "It was like the typical apprentice lineworker's first day at climbing school. Tori climbed good and fell hard — but only a couple of feet. Climbing is much safer now thanks to modern fall-restraint devices that squeeze the pole and catch you if you slip or fall.

"Tori tried out some of the latest climbing tools on the market, met some inspiring women from cooperatives, utilities, and manufacturers, and learned about opportunities in the energy industry."

Tori confirmed, "Girl Power camp was great!"

GIRL POWER EVENT MAY INSPIRE FUTURE CO-OP EMPLOYEES

Megan Balderson of Stafford County was a bit of an outlier at Girl Power, an annual event hosted by the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives. The association created Girl Power three years ago to introduce young women — primarily high school-aged girls — to opportunities in the energy industry.

Balderson, 23 and no longer a high school student, has already dipped a toe in several occupations, but she's still looking for the right fit. Currently, she is a waitress while finishing up a certification in cosmetology, but she has concerns that field is oversaturated.

As Balderson moved from one hands-on module to the next, she eagerly tried her hand at replacing a fuse high atop an electric pole using a telescoping fiberglass "hot stick"; she had a knack for it. At one section of the training center in Palmyra, the poles (nicknamed "Smurf" poles) are cut shorter to allow students to stand on the ground while they learn to repair or replace cables. Wearing safety glasses and heavy gloves designed for electrical work, Balderson wrapped stiff wire around electric equipment.

She watched as an operator flew a buzzing drone to check on electrical equipment and listened while an instructor explained the mechanics of a bucket truck.

The most intriguing — and challenging — part of the day was pole climbing, which the young women discovered is harder than it looks. NOVEC's Zach Bell, a first class line technician, worked with Balderson, who slowly made progress up the pole. She admitted she's going to have to work on strength training and technique if she wants to be a lineworker, but the idea appeals to her.

She said she is a hands-on kind of person and pushed to graduate high school a year early. "I was kind of bored in school," she said, "I like to be engaged in my work."

A conversation with one of the female lineworkers at Girl Power offered her some reassurance. She told Balderson that linework is difficult at times, "but I love it. And the pay is excellent. Some people might try to tell you that you can't do it. Don't believe them. You can do it."



NOVEC lineworker Zach Bell shows Megan Balderson the fine points of pole climbing.



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Virginia potato farmers typically plant spuds in March for harvest in July and August.

An Underground Love Affair

Show spuds some affection this February

by Nicole Zema, Virginia Farm Bureau Federation

Roasted, baked, fried or mashed; smothered in gravy or chilled for a summer salad, potatoes are a nutrient-rich vegetable with endless culinary versatility.

February is National Potato Lovers Month — an opportunity to learn more about the world's fourth-largest food crop.

While potatoes are not ranked among the top Virginia vegetable crops, nine growers on the Eastern Shore produce roughly 90% of the state's tubers on 4,000 acres. These potatoes generate upward of \$20 million in annual sales.

The Eastern Shore's sandy loam soil and temperate climate are ideal for growing perfect potatoes, says Ursula Tankard Deitch, a Virginia Cooperative Extension agent in Northampton County. Unlike clay soils, there is more space between soil particles, so water can filtrate instead of pooling on the crop, which helps the tubers grow. Plus, Deitch explains, spuds like it warm, but not too warm.

"The Eastern Shore stays a little warmer in the wintertime compared to the rest of the state," she says.

Virginia potato farmers typically plant spuds in March for harvest in July and August.

While grains like soybeans and corn are produced on greater acreage and therefore gross more in sales, potatoes are the

Eastern Shore's largest vegetable crop, Deitch adds.

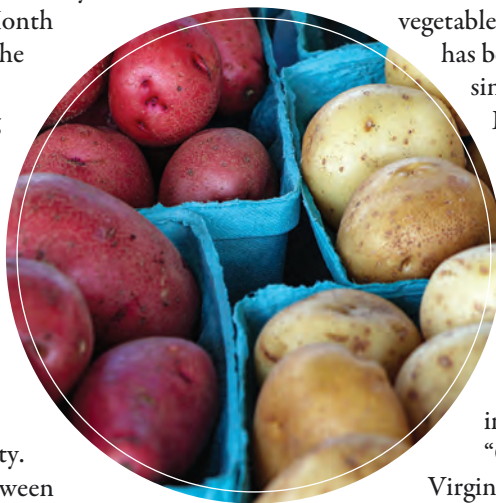
"We have a long history in the potato business on the Eastern Shore," says Accomack County grain and vegetable farmer David Hickman, whose family has been growing potatoes on Dublin Farms since the 1880s. Hickman represents the Eastern Shore on the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation's board of directors, and he chairs the VFBF Specialty Crops Advisory Committee.

The farms' potato varieties — round white, red, purple and yellow flesh — are sold mostly in supermarkets. Some grocery chains have initiated buy-local programs in response to consumer interest in local produce, Hickman says.

"Our potato bags say 'Horntown, Virginia' on them, while most of the bags in stores don't have an identifying area," he says. "In our first year selling to Walmart, their potato sales increased significantly, which reflects consumer desire to know where their produce comes from."

So how does a lifelong grower like his potatoes?

"Mashed with gravy," Hickman says. "But I like them, any way. They're nutritious — a good source of vitamins and minerals. If you don't load them down with high-calorie condiments, they are pretty healthy for you!" ●



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IT'S Winter-Watching SEASON

Story and artwork by Anne M. Dellinger, Contributing Columnist

Keep calm and wait for the snow

Winter has a sneaky way of entering our lives.

It creeps in during December when people are too busy with the **holidays** to be bothered about the air turning nippy.

Everyone simply adds more layers and continues on with their festivities, giving little attention to this seasonal change.

But, when December celebrations are over and the calendar flips to January, winter's cold, powerful presence suddenly becomes evident.

All it takes is a weather advisory on the TV or radio to make winter awareness finally kick in with the listeners!

As chilling words like **snowy, icy, freezing rain, bitter cold** fill the forecast, people of all ages quickly take notice and become anxious winter *watchers*.

Whenever wintry conditions threaten to ruin daily plans, emotions run high. This is especially true in families.

Parents react to the forecast with groans and frowns. They dread the disrupted schedules, extra physical work and travel nightmares they will possibly face.

Their school-age kids cheer and do cartwheels. They feel absolutely "winterful" as they foresee a surprise



holiday literally falling out of the sky, closing their schools.

Does this sound like what happens in your own household when snowflakes start drifting by your window? With the coldest season stretching into March, there may be a lot of stressful *weather watching* moments ahead for you and your family.

You already know that your parents will handle all the adult decisions concerning messed-up plans, but you will have choices to make, too.

A Snow Day off from school is a special gift of time.

Will you spend it by:

- doing something you really enjoy?
- catching up on a school assignment?
- finishing a family chore that you have been putting off?
- enjoying the outdoors by sledding, skiing, walking?

You could fill every minute of your free hours with activities, if you like staying busy. But maybe having some quiet, relaxed *me-time* is more appealing.

December's holiday hustle and bustle may have left you tired, perhaps even feeling a little sickly (sadly, festive gatherings can be superspreader events). A January Snow Day can be a heaven-sent opportunity to curl up under your favorite blanket to just rest and recharge.

Maybe you even need a reboot ... and what better time than January to shut down briefly and then restart again?

January is named for the Roman god Janus who has two faces, one looking into the past, the other gazing into the future.

His profile is a reminder of the endings and new beginnings or restarts in one's life.

What is one memory of the past that you want to hold onto?

Is there a past memory that you want to leave behind?

Can you name one thing that you want to happen in your future?

Perhaps you are hoping to try something new and different this year, but do not know where to start.



Winter is a great time to do some dreaming and devising.

Why not use a Snow Day to start developing your hopes, new ideas and challenges into a plan? (You can still stay under your cozy blanket while your imagination does the work!)

Here are a few suggestions to consider if you do not already have something in mind:

- Explore a new hobby (photography, astronomy, cooking, painting)
- Begin a new healthy habit (walking, running, swimming, yoga)
- Learn to play a challenging game/puzzle (chess, sudoku)

Once you choose a project, then begin collecting any materials needed to help you get started. When the next gift of free time comes along, you will be all set to delve into your new interest even more.

With 31 days in January 2024, 29 in February and 19 days in March, the odds are in favor of a lot of Snow Days happening. And that's reason enough to be a wholehearted winter watcher!

In the meantime, take a break from your winter watching to do some brain exercises. January is International Brain Teaser Month, a great time to give your grey matter a workout! ●



??? Riddles

In the dark they are found without being fetched.
In the light they are lost without being stolen.
What are they?

What building has the most stories?

What has many keys but cannot open a single lock?

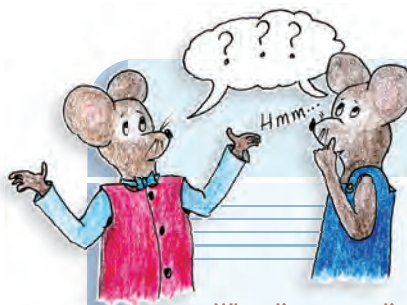
Which 3 letters can frighten a thief away?



HEARTS
How many hearts
do you see?



Answers: stars library piano ICU 24 hearts



CALLING ALL SUPER SLEUTHS

Hay Seed and City Slicker are trying to solve the following riddle.

When I'm young, I'm tall. When I'm old, I'm short.
When I'm alive, I glow. Because of your breath, I die.
What am I?

They know the answer is hidden somewhere in this magazine and they need your help to find it.

Try to solve the riddle and then take a chance to **win a \$25 Amazon gift card** by completing the following requests:

1. Name the answer to the riddle.
2. Find a picture of the answer in the magazine and give page number.
3. How long did it take you to figure out the riddle?
Did someone help you solve it?

Enter online at co-opliving.com/super-sleuth or send answers with name, address and phone number to:

Cooperative Living Super Sleuths
P.O. Box 2340
Glen Allen, VA 23058-2340

Kids Korner submissions are for children under the age of 16.

OCTOBER ISSUE SUPER SLEUTH

The **October Super Sleuths** was about color. For a chance to win a \$25 Amazon email gift card, kids were asked to find the famous scientist and his rainbow experiment hidden in the October issue. They were also asked to identify the scientist, name the scientific tool he used for the experiment, and say whether they have ever used the tool in science class. Lastly, they were asked to name seven colors of the visible spectrum in order.

The correct answers are:

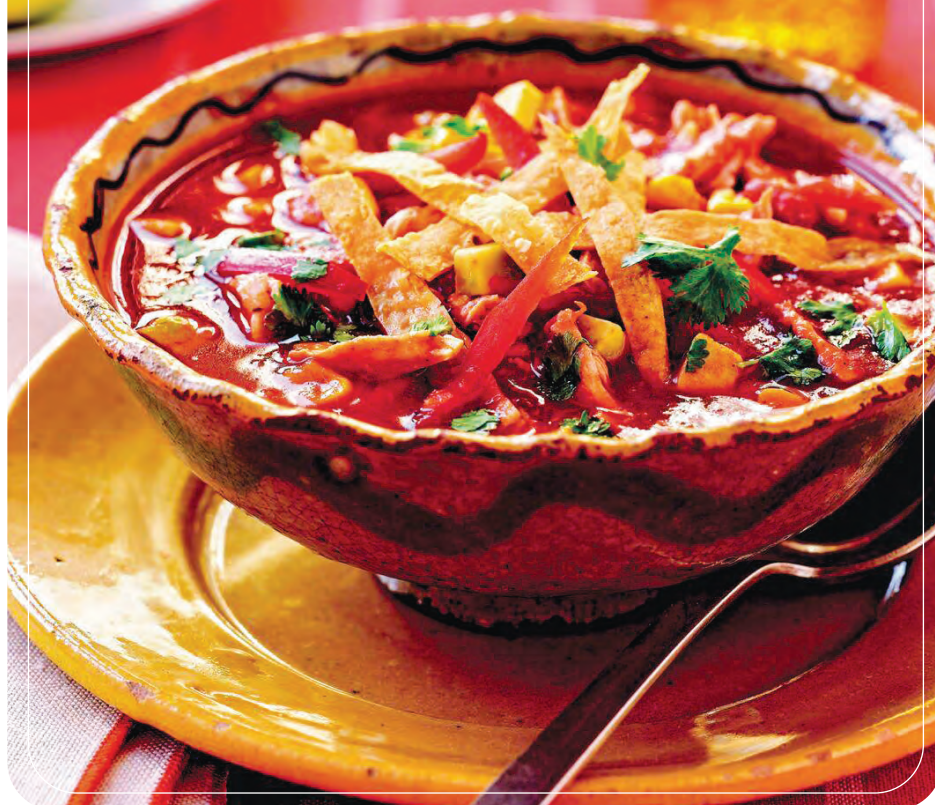
- Page 2
- "The scientist's name was Sir Isaac Newton. He used a prism. I have not used that tool."
- "Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet."

OUR WINNER IS MERCY.
Congratulations, Mercy!



Slow-Cooker

RECIPES



Chicken Tortilla Soup

Recipe courtesy of Family Features

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breasts, visible fat discarded, cut into ½-inch cubes
- 2 cups frozen whole-kernel corn, thawed
- 2 cups fat-free, no-salt-added chicken broth
- 1 (14 ½-oz.) can no-salt-added, diced tomatoes, undrained
- ¼ cup finely chopped onion
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon ancho powder



- 2 medium garlic cloves, minced
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 corn tortillas (6-inch size), cut into ¼-inch-wide strips
- 1 corn tortilla (6-inch size), torn into pieces
- 2-4 tablespoons snipped fresh cilantro
- ¼ cup finely chopped avocado
- ¼ medium red bell pepper, cut into matchstick-size strips

Directions: In slow cooker, stir chicken, corn, broth, tomatoes, onion, sugar, ancho powder, garlic and salt. Cover and cook on low 6-8 hours or on high 3-4 hours. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. On baking sheet, arrange tortilla strips in single layer. Bake 8-10 minutes, or until crisp. Transfer baking sheet to cooling rack. Let strips stand 15 minutes, or until cool. Transfer to airtight container and set aside. When soup is ready, transfer 1 cup to food processor or blender. Stir in tortilla pieces. Let mixture stand 1 minute. Process until smooth. Stir mixture into soup. Stir in cilantro. Ladle soup into bowls. Sprinkle with avocado, bell pepper and reserved tortilla strips.



Paul's Jambalaya

Recipe courtesy of Paul Ross

Ingredients:

- ¾ lb. cooked bacon, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 lb. mild kielbasa sausage, thinly sliced
- 1 lb. hot sausage, thinly sliced
- 1 lb. chicken, cubed
- 1 lb. shrimp, steamed in Old Bay seasoning, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 (15-oz.) cans black beans with juice
- 3 (8-oz.) cans tomato sauce
- 2 (4-oz.) cans green chiles, one mild and one hot
- 2 tablespoons Italian seasoning
- 2 tablespoons onion powder
- ½ bag shredded or matchstick carrots
- black pepper to taste
- 6 cups chicken stock
- 3 bay leaves
- hot sauce (optional)

Directions: Bring all ingredients to a boil in the slow cooker, then reduce to low for 6-8 hours. Stir often. Serve with your choice of rice. Hot sauce(s) on the side to taste.

Got a tasty treat to share?

Email your favorite 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.





You could qualify for weatherization assistance

If you have an older home that's in need of some weatherization updates, you could qualify for assistance to complete the improvements with the Weatherization Assistance Program. Proper weatherization can reduce energy usage by an average of 25%.

If you qualify, a professional energy audit will be completed to learn which improvements will save the most energy, so less of your money goes out the window and more stays in your pocket.

SEE IF YOU QUALIFY:

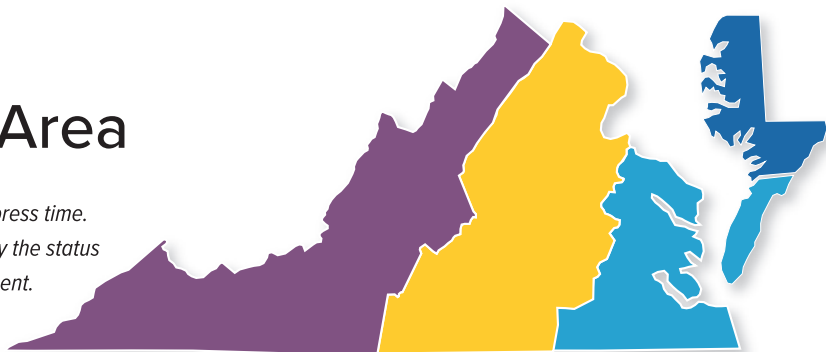
Virginia residents check
dhcd.virginia.gov/wx

Maryland residents check either
dhcd.maryland.gov/Residents/Pages/wap/default.aspx
Or energy.maryland.gov/govt/Pages/CleanEnergyLMI.aspx

Improvements are made by licensed contractors and could include installing insulation, performing tune-ups to heating and cooling systems, and more.

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

FEBRUARY

17 LURAY. PACA's Polar Bear Plunge. Lake Arrowhead. 1 p.m. (540) 742-9386. Pacapolarbearplunge.com.

MARCH

9-10, 16-17 HIGHLAND CO. Highland County Maple Festival. Highlandcounty.org.

PIEDMONT

FEBRUARY

16, 23 MINERAL. Fish Fry. St. Jude's Catholic Church. 4:30-7 p.m. Louisacatholics.org.

17 LOUISA. Expo and Seed Share. Louisa Baptist Church. (540) 967-3422. Louisacvmg.org.

24 CULPEPER. Don't Hide Behind the Mask. The Culpeper Center. 7-11 p.m. (540) 812-4264. Safejourneys.org/events.

MARCH

1, 8, 15, 22 MINERAL. Fish Fry. St. Jude's Catholic Church. 4:30-7 p.m. Louisacatholics.org.

PRINT DEADLINES: Feb. 1 for March 15-April 15
March 1 for April 15-May 15

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Into the Vortex

A surprise journey through modern healthcare

by Margo Oxendine, Contributing Columnist



Well, without any clue, I have entered yet again into what I call the “medical vortex.” It might almost be

funny if it weren’t so scary.

There I was, walking purposefully along the wooded roads and fields near my house, and feeling great.

Then, I went to the doctor for a check-up. That’s how it always begins to swirl in the medical vortex.

The doctor listens to my heart and says, “Your heart murmur seems to be getting louder.”

Now, I can’t remember when some doctor or other didn’t mention that I had a heart murmur. But they always seemed as if it were nothing to worry about. Of course, usually during those past times, there were other more dire things we were actually worrying about.

Anyway, next thing I know, I’m off to a nearby hospital, which I do not happen to prefer or ever use, for an electrocardiogram. It doesn’t hurt, and you get to look at whatever it is they’re looking at. Trouble is, you don’t have the faintest idea what it is you’re looking at, other than your beating heart.

The hospital then says it will let me know the results in “24 to 48 hours.”

So I go home and wait. And wait and wait. The results did not come back for five weeks. Is it any wonder I don’t like this hospital? Ironically, the bill arrived weeks before the results.

When the results finally did arrive, I found myself shuttled off to a cardiologist. He held up my electrocardiogram and said to me, “This is very concerning.” Words you do not ever want to hear.

He said whatever procedures needed to be done — and he laid out a specific protocol — could “probably wait until after the holidays.” This was in mid-November. This was fine with me. I’m a procrastinator, as you may know by now.

Yet, the very next day, I got a call from a different



hospital, one that I actually love — as much as one can love a hospital. I have always had as good an experience as one can have at this hospital. They

say to find someone to drive me there and then back home, in about a week. And not to eat or drink after midnight — you know the drill.

So I spent a week in utter angst. I was a mess. There was nothing I could do but wait.

I finally went on Nov. 30, and I had a transesophageal echocardiogram, a TEE. This is where you gargle some foul-tasting lidocaine a few times, and then you get some heavy-duty drug injected in your arm, and then they stick a long tube with a camera down your throat, through your chest, and behind your heart, so they can take a few snapshots. It wasn’t as bad as I had feared, probably because I was half out of it.

So now, as I write this, I wait for the cardiologist to call me back with the results. That could happen today, or next week, or, who knows when? But I know how the medical vortex works. It’s never “everything’s OK; don’t worry.” There’s always one more scary step, followed by another, and perhaps even another. What a way to spend the holidays! I am asking for your prayers, please, if you’re so inclined. By the time you read this, I will probably have more to say about it. ●

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 **Jan. 20**. The winner will receive a **\$25 Amazon email gift card**.

Reader Photo



PHOTO COURTESY CHUCK BEDELL



Seeing the Forest for the Trees

Virginia pine deserves a second look

by Steve Carroll, Contributing Columnist

If you live in the mid-Atlantic, you've surely seen Virginia pine, though you may have given it just a passing glance. It's not as tall and graceful as Eastern white pine, and it lacks the striking red-brown, platy bark of loblolly pine. Nevertheless, a large Virginia pine growing in an open field or along a thin-soiled ridgeline can have a dramatic presence against the skyline.

Virginia pine (*Pinus virginiana*), also known as scrub pine, grows from Long Island south to northern Georgia and Alabama (Cold Hardiness Zones 5-8). In the mid-Atlantic, it's common throughout the Piedmont and lower-elevation mountains, and locally common along the Coastal Plain. It favors well-drained, acidic to neutral soil, and is typically found in dry fields and forests, rocky woodlands, and other sunny, dry habitats, including on poor sites where other trees struggle. On higher-quality sites, it is usually replaced over time by deciduous hardwoods. Its tolerance of poor conditions makes it useful in erosion control and reclamation of mining and other disturbed sites.

Virginia pine is a mid-sized, relatively short-lived tree. It typically reaches 30-50 feet in height and 12-14 inches in diameter, though on a good site it can grow taller. The national champion, which grows in Tamarack Park in Fairfax County, Va., stands 91 feet tall!

Needles are 1 1/2 to 3 inches long, usually somewhat twisted, and in bundles of two. The small male cones appear in spring, when they release large amounts of pollen before dropping off. Female cones are larger, roughly egg-shaped, and 1 1/2 to nearly 3 inches long. These take two years to mature, at which time they open and release their seeds. The dry, woody female cones are generally held on the tree for several years, and the large number of these persistent cones is a good visual clue for identifying this tree from a distance.

In addition to its role in land reclamation, Virginia pine has other uses. Its long fibers make it a good choice for paper pulp. It has historically been used for mine timbers, railroad ties and rough lumber, but its tendency to warp makes it an inferior choice for construction-grade wood. In the Southeast, it is sometimes used for holiday trees.

Traditionally, Native Americans had many uses for Virginia pine's bark and needles. For example, the Cherokee bathed in needle soaks to treat rheumatism, chewed the bark to

Virginia pine's long fibers make it a good choice for paper pulp.

A Virginia pine growing along the Blue Ridge Parkway.



PHOTO BY DAVID BROSSARD VIA FLICKR



Needles and an open female cone.

PHOTO BY MILO PYNE COURTESY NATURESERVE VIA FLICKR

treat diarrhea, and used the tree in various ways as a treatment for colds.

This pine is also important for wildlife. Seeds are eaten by various birds and small mammals; deer browse lower branches; and caterpillars of many butterflies and moths feed on the needles. It provides winter wildlife cover, especially when growing in near-pure stands, and woodpeckers carve out the softer wood of older trees for their cavity nests.

As a Virginia pine matures, its crown opens up and spreads, giving it a distinctive appearance. In his "Natural History of Trees of Eastern and Central North America," naturalist Donald Culross Peattie wrote, "A Chinese landscape painter would not despise the silhouette of these trees, marching over the crest of some hill or etched against the slanting lines of Virginia's winter rains."

It may just be scrub pine to some, but it can strike a fine pose growing in the right place. ●

Steve Carroll is a botanist and ecologist who speaks and writes about trees, gardening and the world of plants. He is the co-author of "Ecology for Gardeners," published by Timber Press.

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DEADLINE: Feb. 5 for March 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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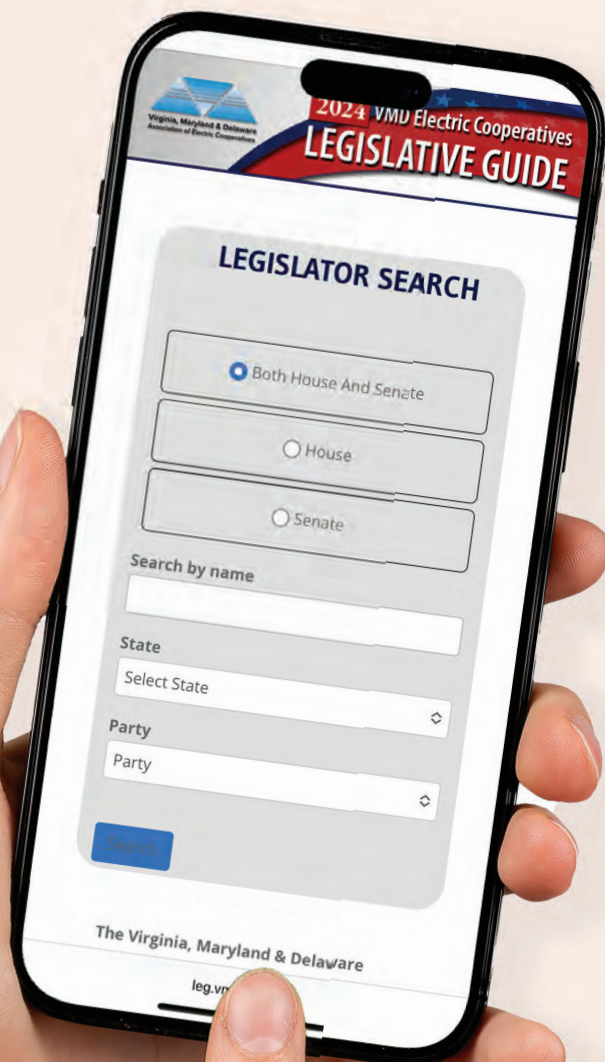
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We the Co-op People

2024 Legislative Guides for Virginia and Maryland now online

by Andrew Vehorn, Vice President, Member & External Affairs for VMDEAC



As we stand at the threshold of a new year, *Cooperative Living* is delighted to announce the release of the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives' 2024 Legislative

Guides for Virginia and Maryland.

These online guides stand as valuable tools for our cooperative members, embodying the principles that define our shared commitment to community, cooperation and civic engagement.

One of the key Cooperative Principles is cooperation among cooperatives.

In Annapolis and Richmond, advocacy efforts reflect the collective strength and unity of our cooperative community as we navigate the intricacies of divided government. As an association, we are proud to work with elected officials who share an interest in our cooperatives and the communities they serve.

The Cooperative Principles, including voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, and concern for community, underscore the cooperative commitment to civic engagement. By actively participating in the democratic process, co-op members contribute to shaping policies that align with their values and address the unique needs of their communities.

Civic engagement is not a partisan endeavor for electric cooperatives; it is a manifestation of our dedication to cooperative values. In both the Virginia and Maryland General Assemblies, we remain fiercely bipartisan in our advocacy for cooperative interests. Our mission is clear: to champion good public policy that ensures affordable, reliable and clean energy for our members.

The 2024 Legislative Guides provide a comprehensive overview of key issues, legislative priorities, and contact information for elected officials. Armed with this information, we hope that readers will engage with their legislators, amplifying the cooperative voice and contributing to the public policy process. ●

DON'T BE Flurry, Happy

by Laura Emery, Staff Writer



▶ BABY, IT'S COLD OUTSIDE ▶

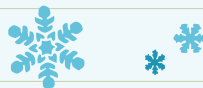
Dad Travis Melton proudly holds bundled-up twins Bailee and Lainee.

PHOTO SUBMITTED BY VICKY BLOSSER



◀ SLEIGH IT AIN'T SO

Evelyn and Luke can't believe how much fun it is to play in the snow. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY ESTHER CAMPBELL



▶ IT'S COLD, I KID YOU NOT!

Ain't nobody goat time for this. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY ANNA GARRETT



WE WANT TO SEE YOUR PHOTOS!



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You may also mail your photo(s) to: Say Cheese, P.O. Box 2340, Glen Allen, VA 23058-2340. Do not send originals; photos cannot be returned.

▶ IT'S RUFF OUT THERE

Lance and Winnie are ready to brave the dog days of winter.

PHOTO SUBMITTED BY CHRISSY LARGE



▶ FOR REAL, DOE

Did someone ring the deer bell? A curious welcoming committee awaits at Shadow Mountain Escape.

PHOTO SUBMITTED BY KAREN RIDDLE



ATTO SPORT - THE ONLY MOBILITY SCOOTER YOU WILL EVER NEED

Many mobility scooters exist, and though they all get you from A to B, they vary significantly in features and capabilities.

How did Anna start to enjoy life to the fullest?

At 56, a back surgery left me reliant on a cane, making life difficult. Trips to the store or meeting friends became daunting, and I even cancelled an anniversary trip to Italy.

My husband bought me a scooter, but it was heavy, and uncomfortable to use daily. It left me feeling more disabled than free.

Then, I discovered the ATTO Sport, which was a game-changer. It's sturdy, splits into 2 pieces so I can lift it into my car trunk by myself, and even store it in the plane's overhead compartment without any trouble – so we took the trip to Italy! I'm independent again, going wherever I want, and doing it in eye-catching style. Now my husband struggles to keep up...



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