

# WEC CO-OP CURRENTS

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The newsletter of Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., East Montpelier, Vermont.

August 2003

## WEC To Generate Power From Methane

*Co-op, Casella Announce Joint Project To Produce Renewable Energy*

By Barry Bernstein and Avram Patt

The Board of Directors and management of Washington Electric Cooperative are pleased to announce to our members that we have begun the process of developing an electric-generation project that will be a major source of affordable renewable energy for many years to come.

The project will generate electricity from methane gas produced at the state's largest landfill in Coventry, Vermont. The power produced will be used by WEC solely to serve our own members' future energy needs.

Although we are just beginning the formal approval process for this project (which ultimately culminates with a membership vote), we wanted you to be the first to know.

As members and readers of *Co-op Currents* are aware, the Co-op has been looking to meet our future long-term energy needs from renewable sources to the greatest extent possible. After much analysis, we determined that renewable sources were likely to be economical, and that the costs would be much more stable and predictable over longer periods of time than other alternatives (oil, natural gas, etc.). The fact that the fuel source and power-generation facility

Washington Electric Cooperative's waste-to-energy station will be constructed at the state's largest landfill, in Coventry. At right is the landfill's entrance, near Vermont Route 5. Below, a new section of the lined landfill.



will be local should enable WEC to avoid "congestion charges," a cost that may soon be imposed upon utilities for long-distance power transmission. And the economic benefits (construction and operation of the facility) will stay within Vermont.

### Some Background

There are presently an estimated 230 landfill gas-to-electricity projects operating in the United States. Landfill gas has been a significant source of WEC's existing power supply since early 2002. When we stopped taking nuclear power from Vermont Yankee we replaced most of it by purchasing low-cost power from a landfill generator in Connecticut. That contract will expire at the end of 2004. However, we recognized then that

developing our own landfill-gas generating facility could offer us many benefits compared to other options.

The Coventry landfill is owned and operated by New England Waste Services of Vermont, a wholly owned subsidiary of Casella Waste Systems, Inc. The landfill is currently in the process of obtaining permits for an expansion that is projected to extend its life at least through 2030.

We first entered into discussions with Casella more than a year ago, and reached a preliminary agreement in late December 2002. This summer, we finalized our agreements.

### Benefits for WEC, its members, and the environment

Over the coming months, we will be providing Co-op members with detailed



### Inside

**WEC is hosting regional dinner meetings in Moretown and Corinth** for Co-op members, to share information and to listen and learn. Consider attending these September meetings. See page 2.

**Outages in East Montpelier and nearby areas have inconvenienced many members.** Read about the reasons and WEC's efforts to remedy them on page 2.

**GREEN POWER!** Co-ops and municipal utilities all over America are getting serious about it. Page 3.



Filmmaker John O'Brien (with friend Mel, above) finds inspiration and life-lessons in his native Tunbridge. O'Brien, and his new movie 'Nosey Parker,' are profiled on page 4.

**Work starts on new South Walden substation.** See photos, page 7.

**Washington Electric Cooperative**  
East Montpelier, VT 05651

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# Outages, And An Avian Tragedy

**M**ost Vermonters are familiar with the great blue heron. A long-legged wading bird with a curved neck, pointed beak and large wingspan, herons arouse a sense of wonder and respect among most people, no matter how often they see them.

But unfortunately, it was a heron that caused an outage during the evening of August 7 that affected everyone who receives power through Washington Electric's East Montpelier substation. At some time around 8:45 p.m., the bird flew into the high-voltage lines leading from the substation's transformers, killing the heron and triggering an electrical outage.

"We were getting calls from people who live on every one of the feeders (power line circuits) in that area," said WEC Engineering and Operations Director Dan Weston, "so we knew the problem was at the substation."

Linemen Bob Fair, Tim Pudvah, Mark Maloney and Larry Brassard all responded, driving to the East Montpelier substation from their homes. They found the dead bird, but fortunately they also found that none of the substation equipment was ruined. They were able to

make repairs and have the system running again in about 40 minutes – which included drive time to the substation.

Approximately 1,500 Co-op members receive their power through the East Montpelier substation.

## Tougher problem

Accidents and mishaps are bound to happen when you impose an electric system on the natural environment. But Co-op members in that same general area and elsewhere also have a legitimate gripe this summer about repeated power losses (blinking and momentary interruptions) and outages on WEC's lines.

They are the result of moisture, during this unusually rainy summer, shorting out electrical devices that are faulty to begin with.

Readers of *Co-op Currents* know that WEC has had problems with "cutouts" (a fuse and housing assembly) manufactured by the A.B. Chance Company. They were purchased and mounted by the thousands on WEC's electric system in the early 1990s. The



*The crack in this insulator reveals the problems WEC is having with certain equipment installed just a decade ago. The only solution is replacing all the faulty insulators and cutouts.*

company was a reputable manufacturer and sold its cutouts and insulators (which are also proving faulty) to many utilities. But the porcelain housing has proved susceptible to cracking in Vermont's extreme weather, which allows moisture to enter and short out the device.

"With this high humidity and heat they're failing in great numbers," Weston said.

Sometimes the result is a full-scale power outage affecting several homes, farms and businesses. Other times the power fails very briefly before a device called a "recloser" automatically kicks the power back on again. But even that brief interruption causes digital clocks and some other devices to need to be reset.

Recurring problems have been worst in East Montpelier (in the Horn of the Moon area), in Middlesex and in Fayston. But they have affected other areas as well.

"We are fully aware of the nuisance and inconvenience to our members that these problems are causing," said Weston. "I guess I need to ask for their

patience while we work toward replacing these malfunctioning devices."

It is a labor-intensive, step-by-step process. In July WEC's crews shut down the Horn of the Moon feeder for an hour while they worked their way through, replacing the cutouts and insulators with a new kind made of polymer that resists cracking. But WEC has 1,200 miles of line to maintain, and during the summer construction season new homes are being added on nearly every day and the Co-op must respond to their owners' requests for new line extensions. There's only so much the crews can get done in a 10-hour work day.

"When we get an opportunity to isolate an area and take care of it, we'll be doing that," said Weston. "But a lot of the time we're jumping from place to place responding to people's calls for help, while also trying to do our summer maintenance and line construction.

"The best I can tell folks now is that we realize what the problem is and are doing our best to address it. In all honesty, it's going to take time." 

## Co-op Currents

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*The Board of Directors' regularly scheduled meetings are on the last Wednesday of each month, in the evening. Members are welcome to attend. Members who wish to discuss a matter with the Board should contact the president through WEC's office. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. For information about times and/or agenda, or to receive a copy of the minutes of past meetings, contact Administrative Assistant Deborah Brown, 802-223-5245.*

## WEC To Convene Local Meetings In Moretown, Corinth

**O**nce every year Washington Electric Cooperative hosts a dinner and its Annual Membership Meeting, where WEC's leadership attempts to bring people up to date on subjects related to energy, finances, system maintenance and WEC policies. The Annual Meeting also presents an opportunity for Co-op members to ask questions of their own and tell WEC's Board and management what's on their minds.

However, a year between meetings can be a pretty long time. The Co-op's leaders also realize that some WEC members might be more inclined to attend a dinner and discussion held closer to home.

For these reasons Washington Electric has planned two local get-togethers in September. These will be held on Tuesday, September 9, in Corinth

*continued on page 5*

## Wind, Methane And Walnuts

# America Is Slowly Growing Greener

Like Rodney Dangerfield, green energy “don’t get no respect” from the energy establishment. The accompanying chart, reprinted from *Electric Co-op TODAY*, reveals some truths about the U.S. energy supply, including a fact that may be surprising to Vermonters: that 50 percent of electric generation in this country still comes from coal. Nuclear energy is second with 20 percent, followed by natural gas at 18 percent.

Hydroelectricity – “renewable” because it does not deplete a finite resource, but not considered “green” when large facilities alter or destroy habitat – comes in fourth, generating 7 percent of the nation’s electric energy. Finally, according to the Energy Information Agency, petroleum-powered plants produce 2 percent of U.S. power.

Interestingly, those figures add up to 97 percent. Where does the other 3 percent come from?

One reasonable guess would be the combined forces of wind, solar, methane and geothermal sources, which the EIA leaves out of its reckoning.

In any case, the nationwide contribution of green and renewable energy is growing. Washington Electric Cooperative generates a portion of its power from its hydroelectric station at the Wrightsville dam, and like other Vermont utilities buys additional power from small-scale, in-state hydro projects. WEC also purchases electricity generated

from landfill methane in Connecticut. The Co-op’s interest in further methane generation is announced on page 1 of this issue, and in 2001 WEC received a \$1-million federal grant for a future wind-turbine project (still in the early planning stages).

However, WEC is not alone. Cooperative and investor-owned utilities, municipalities and statewide power entities all over the country, are increasingly interested in alternative energy. Here are some examples.

### Methane in coal country

Coal is king in Kentucky. Ninety-seven percent of Kentucky’s electricity is generated from coal, which is the cheapest fossil fuel used for electric generation. That explains why Kentucky has the lowest average residential electricity rates in the country (5.3 cents per kilowatt hour). Kentucky has been

mining coal since 1820 but is still sitting on top of an estimated 84 percent of the original resource – some 88 billion tons of extractable coal, according to the Kentucky Coal Association.

But the negative environmental effects of coal-burning power production are well known (though the industry is developing new technologies to reduce emissions). Responding to public interest, and particularly to inquiries from Toyota Motor Manufacturing Co. about supplying green power to its North American headquarters in Erlanger, Ky., East Kentucky Power Cooperative (EKPC) is building three trash-to-energy facilities at Kentucky landfills.

EKPC generates electricity for the 16 distribution co-ops that own it. The facilities, developed at a cost of around \$4 million each, will be the first landfill-gas (methane) electric stations in Kentucky and will come online in September.

“They’ll produce a total of about 10 megawatts of power,” EKPC spokesman Kevin Osbourn told *Co-op Currents*. “While comparatively that’s not a much power, it’s equivalent to the electricity needs of about 6,800 homes.”

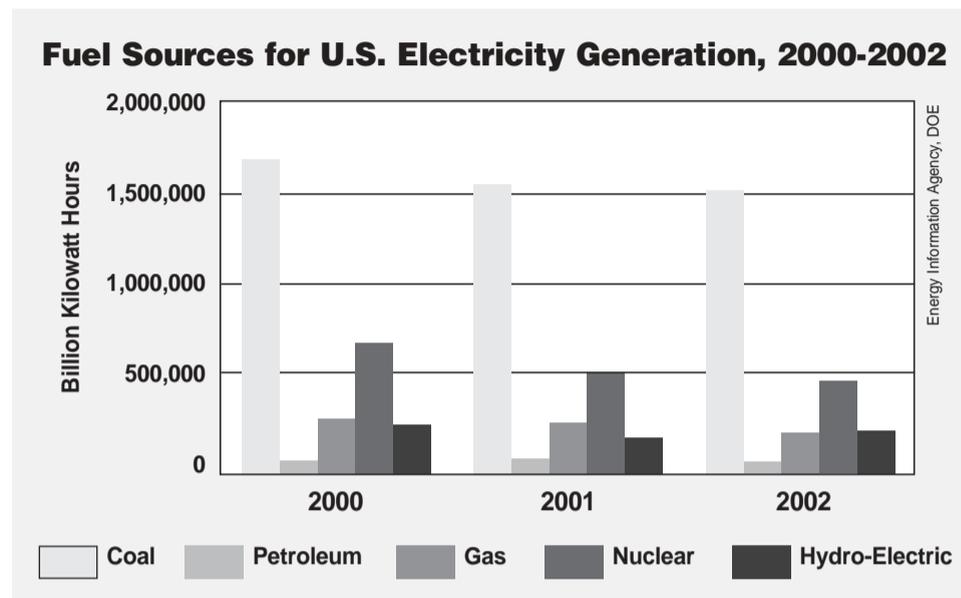
Even in coal country, Osbourn said, the methane-produced power will be economically competitive. “We’re taking a naturally occurring waste product and making affordable electric power from it. EKPC and its member co-ops will be the leaders in green power among electric utilities in the whole southeastern U.S.”

### Wind gaining momentum

Wind is the fastest-growing energy source of any kind in the world. The American Wind Energy Association and the European Wind Energy Association reported in March that wind-electric generating capacity increased by 28 percent in 2002, with investments of \$7.3 billion in new installations. According to these sources, that brought total generation to 31,000 megawatts (MW), enough to power 7.5 million average American homes or 16 million average European homes (note the difference in personal energy consumption).

Wind-powered generators are appearing in many parts of the country. Texas, traditional home of America’s oil barons, is one such place.

Another is Iowa. Interestingly, a pattern



in Iowa is not to erect large wind farms, with enormous turbines to harness the wind, but municipally owned projects with a small number of turbines – often only one. According to *Public Power Weekly*, 31 Iowa cities and towns “own their own wind turbines, are in the process of installing them, or are purchasing power from wind resources owned by others, including schools.”

In neighboring Minnesota wind power is also gaining popularity among publicly owned utilities. The Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency generates electricity for municipal utilities, and has actually lowered its wholesale price for wind power by siting turbines close to electric distribution lines, which avoids transmission costs.

The agency is building more turbines and will sell the power to the municipal utilities in 100-kWh blocks.

“Every block purchased will have the same environmental benefit as planting half an acre of trees or not driving a car 2,400 miles,” said an agency official.

In some places municipal utilities that own wind turbines or buy wind power from regional government entities dedicate the electricity to specific uses, such as schools or town halls, reducing taxpayers’ electric costs for certain services. In Brookhaven, N.Y. (on Long Island), wind power operates the waste treatment facility. In Hull, Massachusetts, a \$750,000 wind turbine powers the streetlights and traffic signals.

### Offbeat

The Dairyland Power Cooperative in Wisconsin, which provides electricity for distribution co-ops in five states, plans to become the first power-generation co-op to use animal waste to make electricity.

Like landfill gas, this is a methane-based technology.

Farms are larger in Wisconsin than in Vermont, and accumulate enough animal waste to make Dairyland’s investment worthwhile. Within five years it should produce up to 25 MW of power – enough for 20,000 homes – using wastes from local dairy and swine farms.

And in Missouri an electric-generation co-op purchased 3,000 tons of damaged walnut shells from a large commercial processor after tornadoes in May ruined the nuts for consumption.

“Rather than just waste (the walnuts) in a landfill, we’ll put them to good use,” said a Central Electric Power Co-op official. The nuts will be mixed with coal at the local power plant, providing nearly 4 million kilowatt-hours of electricity.

“We are always looking for ways to generate green power from our own plants,” the official said, noting that in 2002 the co-op burned 70 tons of shelled corn “just to prove it was a possible green power fuel.”

### Worth it?

Are these efforts to impact the establishment energy market worth it? Last February *The Wall Street Journal* reported that federal regulators had ordered the U.S. Energy Department to design a system of warning markers to keep intruders away from the nuclear waste-storage facility being developed at Yucca Mountain in Nevada for the next 10,000 years.

This is not an easy task, the newspaper pointed out, “considering that the world’s oldest stone monument, a pyramid in Egypt, is only 4,000 years old.”

Perhaps it would be best not to generate that lethal waste in the first place.

# The View From Tunbridge

*John O'Brien's World Is Our Own*

**Y**ou can hear it rumbling up the dirt road, its tires flinging dust and gravel against the stately maples that shade the approach to John O'Brien's farmhouse. When it pulls up in his yard it looks out of place – a FedEx truck, the very symbol of *AMERICA ON THE MOVE*, parked beside O'Brien's sheep pen, where baaing lambs and ewes watch the shorts-clad delivery man stride purposefully to the door. His errand completed, he wheels his truck around and drives quickly back where he came from; FedEx will have no other business today in this human outpost three miles from the little village of Tunbridge, Vermont.

As off-the-beaten-track as John O'Brien's home is, so too are his movies far from the cinematic mainstream. O'Brien is a filmmaker who writes ("makes up" might be more accurate), casts, produces, shoots, edits and markets movies about people for whom the rest of the world, frankly, could give a damn: rural Vermonters, in flannel shirts and floral blouses, with rusty cars, hardened hands and weathered faces.

Chances are pretty good, with O'Brien's films, that many of the characters, who usually play some version of themselves, belong to Washington Electric Cooperative—as does the filmmaker himself, whose father once served as president of WEC's board. And chances are excellent that they look out at the world with a twinkling eye rather than a Hollywood-style flinty glare. For O'Brien uses his characters' interactions with conniving politicians, bemused baby boomers and wealthy urban émigrés to reflect, with humor and affection, upon the human condition.

Humor is a personal trait of O'Brien's, as well. In May he was the featured speaker at Washington Electric's 64th Annual Membership Meeting, where he drew laughter when he quipped (in light of WEC's lawsuit against five towns over property tax appraisals), "I knew things had gotten litigious at the Co-op when (WEC president) Barry Bernstein invited me to be the guest speaker and said he'd have me subpoenaed if I didn't show up."

Then, reflecting on the brief period in the 1970s when his father, Robert R. O'Brien, chaired the WEC board, he recalled the time he and his sister were recruited to lick thousands of envelopes and stamps for a mass mailing to the membership.

"We didn't get paid, but at least we got



Above, John O'Brien of Tunbridge. Below, the emblem he has created for "Nosey Parker". Look for it on a bumper near ewe.

a meal out of it," he said, referring to the envelopes.

However, it was Fred Tuttle, star of O'Brien's 1996 film, *"A Man With A Plan,"* who stole the show at the Annual Meeting, even though he wasn't there. O'Brien played video clips of Tuttle's appearance on NBC's *"The Tonight Show,"* which had 190 Co-op members, employees and guests laughing and grinning proudly as Tuttle charmed and amused host Jay Leno and his urban audience.

## Spreading the word

Today, the FedEx man has brought a copy of the new trailer (preview) for O'Brien's latest release, *"Nosey Parker."* Threading the film onto spools at his hulking metal editing table, he explains that the trailer is a rebus – a series of images and scenes conjuring words or phrases which string together to say, *"A trailer for Nosey Parka ... a moo V 'bye' (child waving) john (use your imagination) O'Brien (picture of Conan). Yule Lovett (picture of Lyle), butt donut take hour word 4 it.. . Watch ferret adder (scary*



snake) theater near ewe."

"Nosey" is conveyed by a pig's snout poking through a knothole. From this image he has created a startlingly odd, oval bumper sticker.

The ubiquitous Spread Fred stickers helped make *"Man With A Plan"* and its leading man something more than a movie – a whimsical touchstone of Vermont identity. It was mass advertising on the cheap. O'Brien hopes to recreate the phenomenon with the pig's nose.

He is, after all, an underdog in the film game.

"On average Hollywood spends \$40 million making a movie and an equal amount promoting it," he explains. "They've got great armies of people out promoting *'Matrix'* and *'Bruce Almighty.'*"

The trailer plays to people already sitting in a movie theater – an apt demographic. If the pig's nose catches on, one driver with the strange emblem on his car will remind everyone in traffic of the Vermont-grown movie, *"Nosey Parker."*

(Perhaps O'Brien will then consider

driving a pig around in his car. He chauffeured Fred Tuttle around Vermont for months, the irrepressible Tuttle hamming it up at the passenger's window whenever they passed a car sporting a Spread Fred sticker.)

In the competitive film industry, the best O'Brien hopes for is to establish himself as a regional filmmaker, a woodchuck Woody Allen (whose movies take place in New York). O'Brien's movies, and O'Brien himself, are locally so well-liked that theater owners are inclined to feature his films, with Vermont-based companies like Magic Hat helping with promotions. But the movies must then be good enough to put people in the seats, or the owners will find others that can. Unlike his Hollywood counterparts, O'Brien spends much of his time personally ferrying canisters of his movies and trailers from one theater to another in his 1992 Honda Civic.

"The business side (of filmmaking) is demanding, to put it mildly," says O'Brien, "but also interesting. I'm a believer that if you've got a good product there's a market out there for it."

## 'A natural resource'

O'Brien, 40, is convinced that Vermont and Vermonters are excellent ingredients for a good product, which doesn't seem to be a widespread opinion in the film industry. He grew up in the same farmhouse he now lives in, to which he returned after a Harvard education. The 200-acre property hosts a flock of sheep, productive apple and maple trees, a vegetable garden, a woodlot, and sometimes Holsteins or Jerseys – when O'Brien can find time for these agricultural pursuits. The furniture inside the house is nearly invisible under piles of books, records and movies.

O'Brien calls himself a "first-generation Vermonter" because his parents moved here from Massachusetts. When they chose Tunbridge they provided their son not only a picturesque location for the movies he would one day make – scenery shown to good effect in the autumnal *"Nosey Parker"* – but also with neighbors and a native culture that O'Brien clearly loves.

He has a particular reverence for elderly Vermonters.

"They are a great natural resource," he says, "unfortunately disappearing. The age group of people from 70 to 100 is unusual in terms of what they've lived through."

O'Brien is especially struck by their ingenuity. His films browse through old tool sheds and include flickering, faded footage of equipment such as hay forks (for elevating hay into a barn) and apple peelers in use.

"These folks remember a completely different way of life. Some people had gas-powered milking machines before electricity came here," he says, and grins conspiratorially as he confides, "Fred Tuttle told me, 'Oh John, I can't milk a cow by hand.'"

In part, he considers his films an elegy to that generation.

"My original idea was just documenting those old-time Vermonters, but to do so in a way that was not just talking heads. Who'd want to watch that? But make it entertaining, and before we know it we'll have watched an anthropological comedy."

O'Brien knows what Hollywood doesn't – that charismatic characters exist by the thousands in rural America. He didn't have to look far for his leading men, Fred Tuttle and the late George Lyford. Both were featured in "Vermont Is For Lovers" (1993) – the first film in what O'Brien calls his Tunbridge Trilogy – with Tuttle subsequently taking the lead in "Man With A Plan" (1996) and Lyford starring in the recently released "Nosey Parker."

"Fred is a WC Fields or Charlie Chaplin kind of character, a natural comedian," says O'Brien. "George is a Tunbridge version of Jimmy Stewart."

A surrounding cast of true-life folks round out the picture O'Brien affectionately paints of his home town. A scene in "Nosey Parker," filmed in nighttime silhouette, shows a line-up of oldsters filing across a lighted farmhouse porch to play 88s (a nearly forgotten card game); their sizes and shapes, their ambulatory diversity (including canes and a motorized wheelchair), and the molasses pace of their progress, are simultaneously funny and endearing – a silent gem of a scene.

O'Brien contrasts these Vermont folks with a sprinkling of actual actors, who portray downcountry interlopers. He's not afraid to milk stereotypes for their humor, but he rejects the ultimate cliché: "That all old Vermonters are fabulous and all newcomers are evil."

So, for example, in "Nosey Parker" he comically sets a gang of town listers loose in a million-dollar mansion, prying through the possessions of the wealthy newcomers under the guise of doing a tax assessment.

His mission, O'Brien says, "is to try to portray what's happening, particularly to small rural communities, which are under terrific economic pressure and social change. Because there's only going to be

A love story about a friendship.



Co-stars Natalie Picoe and George Lyford, in an ad for

**NOSEY PARKER**  
A film by John O'Brien

more of this as Vermont fills up" with new arrivals.

The gentle filmmaker provides at least a partial remedy to the cultural tension. He calls it "good old American tolerance." His movies resolve with his characters learning to accept and find the good in each other. If we can't do this in Vermont, where can it be done?

**Many of his characters belong to Washington Electric Cooperative, as does the filmmaker, whose father was president of WEC's board.**

#### 'A design for living'

What's next for our local filmmaker? O'Brien feels he is finished with the Tunbridge Trilogy, but Vermont offers a great deal more to

explore in the way of social change. In his next film he will search for "a design for living" in a state, and by implication a world, where resources are no longer expendable.

"A day doesn't go by when it doesn't rear its ugly head how much we throw out, how far we drive in Vermont," he says. "This (movie) would be about someone in my situation trying to figure out how to live a life that's not full of contradictions – a good life, so that you'd

say, 'Wow, it's not so hard to conserve electricity, to recycle, to drive smaller cars.'

"But it has to be done with comedy and humor – maybe a combination of Woody Allen and Scott Nearing. It would need to be a populist enough film that not just the VPR (Vermont Public Radio) set would see it."

Regardless of the subject matter, what's sure to come through in John O'Brien's next venture is his deep appreciation of human decency. Along with homespun production values and a disregard for written scripts (O'Brien attains a comfort level for his actors, then lets them create their own dialogue and relationships), this is what differentiates his movies from Hollywood's.

The depth of his concern for people is revealed in the ending of "Nosey Parker," which he dedicates to his since-deceased leading man, 74-year old George Lyford. With the sound track playing "Ain't It Funny How Time Slips Away," O'Brien presents a reverse sequence of photographs of his friend and neighbor,

showing Lyford growing younger and younger, until the chubby infant is linked to the lined and weathered gentleman we've come to know during the course of the film, and a life is revealed.

It's the kind of affectionate and unpretentious touch that makes an O'Brien film special.

## WEC to Convene Local Meetings

*continued from page 2*

(Corinth Town Hall, on the Cookeville Road in West Corinth), and Thursday, September 11 in Moretown (Moretown Town Hall on Route 100B in Moretown Village).

At both events, dinner will be served at 6 p.m., for \$5 per person (reservations required by August 29; call the Co-op if you did not receive a reservation form with your August bill).

The informational meeting and discussion will begin at 7 p.m. Reservations are not required for the discussion, and people are welcome to attend only the discussion (skipping the dinner) if they choose. Both meetings will be open to the public.

"The focus of our presentation will be our recently announced renewable energy project, generating electricity from methane gas at the Coventry landfill operated by Casella Waste Management," said WEC General Manager Avram Patt. "We'll also be discussing the Co-op's energy supply, more broadly."

Equally important, Patt said, is that WEC management, Board and staff members will attend the meetings prepared to hear and respond to the concerns and interests of local Co-op members.

"These could be subjects related to our power-supply and renewable energy policies, or very localized issues about reliability, outage response or anything else," the manager said. "We meet the

members face-to-face once a year at the Annual Meeting if they choose to attend, but this is a chance for us to come out to their locations and make ourselves available."

The September meetings in

Moretown and Corinth could be the start of something new.

"We'll see what the level of interest is," said Patt. "If these meetings are successful we could do something like two meetings a year in the future, rotating among the towns in our service area. That would be a great way to enhance the communication between ourselves and the people we serve." 

**The irrepressible Fred Tuttle would ham it up at the passenger's window whenever they passed a Fred sticker.**

# New Outdoor Employees Learning The Ropes At WEC

**B**rian Wilkin of Barre knows about the volatility of today's job market. A master electrician with 20 years experience, Brian had worked for local electrical contractors Bates & Murray and Norway & Sons after graduating from Spaulding High School in 1982. He rose to the rank of foreman for the latter company, supervising teams of electricians in large construction projects. These included an expansion at National Life in Montpelier, and the new Barre City Elementary School. Next stop on his career path was a job in

Brian Wilkin



substation maintenance with Green Mountain Power Corp. But when Brian spied a job opportunity with Integrated Control Systems, a subcontractor for IBM, working in preventive maintenance with sophisticated computerized machinery, he grabbed it. Suddenly last fall, however, he was out of a job. "I got caught up in the downsizing of the semi-conductor industry," he says. It's tough to lose a job, but Brian knew others were just as bad off. "Hey," he says, "I was there at

IBM the day a thousand people walked out carrying their (workplace possessions) in boxes." That was a corporate layoff that shook Vermont's economy (and is regrettably being repeated on a slightly smaller scale).

Eventually, his skills and experience paid off. In April Brian Wilkin joined the Engineering Department at Washington Electric Cooperative, replacing Kevin Stevens who became WEC's manager of information systems. The engineering staff designs the Co-op's electrical distribution system, including power line extensions for people building new

homes or businesses in WEC's service territory, and redesigns sections of the system where the poles and equipment have become obsolete or need to be relocated to improve electrical service to WEC's membership. It's a job that involves more contact with the public than Brian's previous jobs, and he was thrown into the mix almost immediately when co-worker Steve Hart took a leave of absence following the birth of a child.

Wilkin, a father of two, says he feels fortunate to have landed with a stable local company that values his knowledge and experience.

Wilkin is not the only electrician to find a new career path at Washington Electric Co-op this spring. Shane Blake, 32, hired as a lineman in June, has a similar history.

"I worked at Cabot Creamery,

Shane Blake, left, and Hans Pope-Howe



## WEC CO-OP STORE

### WHOLE HOUSE SURGE PROTECTION



#### • Meter-base Surge Suppression Device

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**Panamax Max 2 coax device:** surge suppression for two appliances (tv, VCR, audio, cable modem) and one Coax cable. Member price \$49.95 (no charge shipping/handling when ordered by 10/1/03.

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making cheddar cheese, after graduating from Hazen Union," says the Woodbury native. But after two years Shane took a job with Benoit Electric Company, and then moved on to Lamberton Electric in Montpelier, taking night classes for four years to become a journeyman electrician. He, too, specialized in commercial and industrial wiring, and became a crew foreman during his nine years with Lamberton (where Cy Lamberton, a longtime WEC employee, also works).

Shane says the motivation for switching from journeyman electrician to apprentice lineman was largely to get away from the construction industry, which rises and falls in relation to economic factors.

"Hopefully utility work will be more stable," he says. A position on WEC's line crew came open when veteran lineman George Brett left the Co-op to move to Montana.

Shane began work with Washington Electric on June 24, three weeks after his daughter was born. (He and his wife also have a three-year-old son.)

"It's hard work," he says, "but challenging. It's interesting to see electrical work from this angle, after working so long in commercial wiring."

Hans Pope-Howe agrees that line work is challenging. That's one reason he likes it. Hans, 22 and recently married, is another new Co-op lineman. Raised in East Calais in a Washington Electric Co-op home, the 1999 U-32 graduate replaced lineman Ed Schunk, who took a new position at WEC monitoring the condition of the Co-op's 1,200 miles of power line.

Hans (whose great-great grandfather founded the Boy Scouts) studied automotive technology at U-32, and later spent six months in the diesel program at Wyoming Technical College. A true Vermonter, he was eager to return home, where he took a job restoring and repairing Land Rovers in Williston.

"I got pretty sick of working on cars," he says. "I'd always been interested in line work because it's good, physical labor, and I like working outdoors. This seemed like a great career move."

Now living in Calais, Hans and his wife are expecting a child.

So the WEC family is growing – new employees, with new spouses and new children. And an old commitment to serving the members of Washington Electric Cooperative. Hans, Shane and Brian will learn all about that as they pursue their new careers at WEC. 

## 'Men Working' In Walden

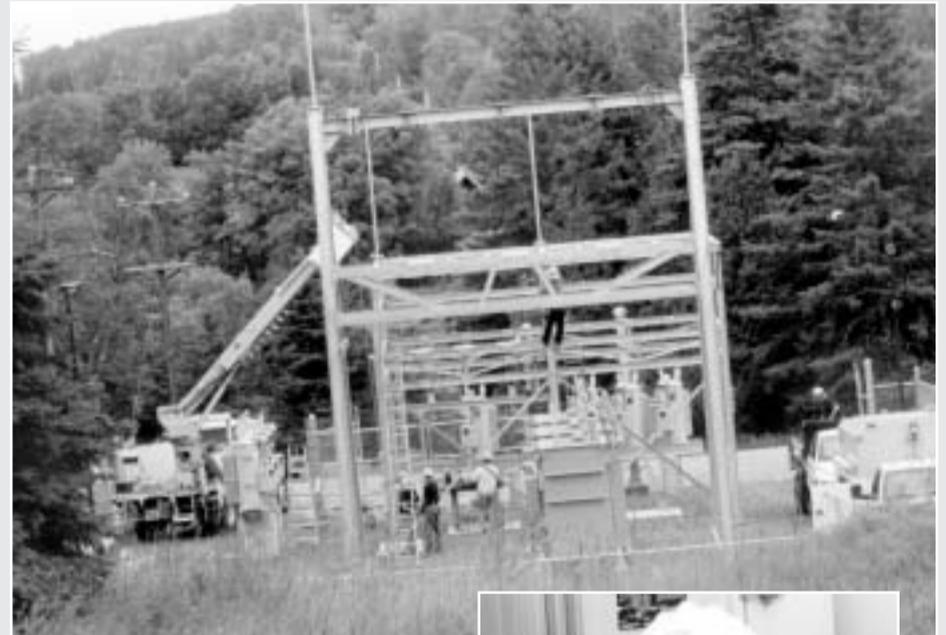
In May 2002 the members of Washington Electric Cooperative voted to go forward with a new \$400,000 substation in South Walden. Presently that area is served by an aging facility inadequate to meet increasing demand in the towns of South Walden, Cabot, Wheelock, Stannard, West Danville, Woodbury, East Calais and Greensboro. Building a new facility also provides the Co-op an opportunity to upgrade its distribution system.

Site-preparation work was performed last fall, and transformers and other equipment were shipped to the new substation's location near the junction of Route 15 and the South Walden Road. WEC's operations workers got started on construction of the substation itself in June. Summer is a busy time for the line workers, so they're making progress on the substation between other jobs. But the facility should be in operation by the fall.

This is the second substation-construction project undertaken by WEC employees in recent years. In 2001 the staff replaced the substation in Moretown with an improved and more worker-friendly facility. The South Walden sub is of a similar design, with a few improvements suggested by the line workers themselves after completing the Moretown project.



Putting it all together, linemen Gene Manning (above) and Shane Blake (right).



"Like a big erector set." That's how Foreman Bob Fair describes the new substation WEC crew members are building in a clearing in South Walden (above). Right, WEC's "substation guru," Steve Anderson. Below, from left, linemen Gene Manning and Rich Halstrom, with Foreman Bob Fair (white shirt).



### MARKETPLACE

**FOR SALE:** Queen-size waterbed. Frame is dark stained wood with bookcase headboard. Comes with two waveless mattresses, plus liner, heater and water conditioner. No linens. \$50. Call 433-6170 days.

## Power From Methane

continued from page 1

information about the project. Briefly, here are some of the key benefits and characteristics:

- **Long-term, affordably priced baseload power.** "Baseload power" is the foundation of an electric utility's power supply (as opposed to "peaking power," which is needed only in times of excess demand). Baseload power sources must be dependable and constant. The Coventry facility should generate power more than 90 percent of the time, similar to other baseload power plants. Our forecasts show that this power should be available to us for 30 years at a levelized cost of less than 5 cents per kWh, which is a competitive price compared to alternatives. Moreover, this is a price we can predict with some accuracy, as it will not be affected by the ups and downs of natural gas or other market fuel prices. In its initial stages, the project will generate about 3.2 megawatts (MW), which equals the amount of power we used to purchase from Vermont Yankee, and it could eventually generate up to 6 MW. That will help us meet future needs as other existing supply contracts end and our membership continues to grow. It will also reduce our reliance on the electricity spot market, which is sometimes expensive. Our forecasts show that the Coventry project will help keep our rates stable, more so than other options.
- **A source of clean, local, renewable energy.** This project will use gas created by the decomposition of wastes in the landfill, and will reduce the need for generation from non-renewable and imported sources.
- **Reduction in the flaring of landfill gas and associated emissions.** Landfill methane is a greenhouse gas, and modern landfills are required to collect and burn (flare) the gas rather than to allow it to enter the atmosphere. The gas at the Coventry Landfill is presently being collected and flared. Generating electricity will use the gas for a beneficial purpose, and should almost eliminate the emissions from flaring.
- **A low-profile project.** Although the project will supply WEC members with a major portion of our energy, it is actually a very small project compared to most other types of electric generation. It will require construction of a modestly-sized building on the landfill site itself. To get the power to WEC's territory, a single-pole line will be built along existing roads to a VELCO transmission substation in neighboring Irasburg. (VELCO is the statewide

transmission company owned by Vermont's utilities, including WEC). The project will thus provide economic benefits to those Vermont communities.

### The approval process begins

The Coventry Landfill project will require a number of approvals before it can be built. These include:

- 1. Financing approval.** We are submitting a loan application to our lender, the federal Rural Utilities Service (RUS), for \$6.34 million. We will borrow up to this amount to cover all costs of building the project, including all engineering and regulatory costs. By spreading this cost over the life of the project at attractive interest rates, we are able to keep the power cost from this project lower and more predictable than were we to purchase the same amount of power elsewhere.
- 2. State approvals.** We will be submitting our proposal to the Vermont Public Service Board. Under the PSB's "Section 248" review process, all aspects of the project will be carefully examined, from the economics and rate impact to the local environmental impacts in the Coventry area. If the PSB approves the project, it will issue a Certificate of Public Good. In addition, the generating facility will require an Air Quality Permit. New England Waste Services will need a Solid Waste Permit for its proposed expansion at the landfill, and Act 250 approval.
- 3. Member vote.** The final step, as required for electric cooperatives by Vermont law, is membership approval. Upon receipt of a Certificate of Public Good, we will ask members to approve the project (as you have done in recent years for the rebuilding of our Moretown and South Walden substations). We hope to present this for a vote in conjunction with our next annual meeting in May 2004.

### A lot of work ahead

The Co-op's staff and your Board of Directors have devoted a great deal of time and energy to developing this proposal, beginning more than two years ago with a detailed analysis of power-supply options available to us, before beginning to narrow our options. It is a lot of work for a small utility, but we felt strongly that we were on the right path.

We have been assisted throughout this time by some very capable and experienced people. Our power supply planner, Stan Faryniarz of La Capra Associates and others at that firm, have helped us analyze and constantly refine and sharpen our economic analysis. Two well-known engineering firms have provided us with their expertise. Dufresne-Henry, Inc. conducted a



One of several wellheads at New England Waste Services' Coventry facility, which enable technicians to monitor the flow of gases and liquids within the landfill.

detailed study of gas being produced at the landfill and projected future gas production through the life of this project. E-Pro Engineering has provided us with their recommendations and cost estimates for getting electricity from the landfill to the grid.

We especially want to thank Gordon Deane of Palmer Management, our landfill gas consultant. Starting 20 years ago with the first commercial landfill gas generation project in the country, in Brattleboro, Gordon has developed numerous successful landfill gas projects in the United States and elsewhere. His services have been invaluable to us. We look forward to working with these and other project partners as we go through the approval process, and then as we construct and operate the facility.

We also wish to thank the folks at Casella Waste Systems for providing us with voluminous information about the Coventry landfill and its operation, and for their enthusiasm in partnering with us to develop a renewable energy project on their site.

Although we have been careful and rigorous in developing this plan, the real work is just beginning. We are confident that, with the continued help of our expert consultants and Casella Waste Systems, we will gain all approvals necessary, and then construct and begin operating this project according to plan. The plant will generate electricity for WEC's members starting in early 2005

### The reward

Day in and day out, our job at Washington Electric Co-op continues to focus on operating those 1,200 miles of poles and wire that bring electricity to our 9,400 members on the back roads of

central Vermont.

We also have an equally important responsibility for securing the electricity that flows over those lines. In recent years, as global, national and local environmental concerns have grown, and as the economics of renewable energy sources have improved, we began seriously investigating renewable energy not just as a token part of our supply, but as the major part.

**The fact that the facility will be local should enable WEC to avoid costs related to long-distance power transmission, and the economic benefits will stay within Vermont.**

And, as we've seen the utility industry wracked by turmoil, instability, volatility and sometimes fraud, we took a more old-fashioned approach and decided that there is a lot of value to stability and

predictability, through ownership.

The Coventry landfill gas project is a major step for us, and we hope it helps lead the way for others in Vermont and the nation. As Co-op members, you presently have more renewable energy in your supply than perhaps any other utility customers in the country today. With this project, we will be able to maintain and even increase our renewable energy supply for many years to come, at an affordable cost.

We take great pleasure in making this announcement in *Co-op Currents*, and look forward to providing you with much more information in the coming months. As always, feel free to contact the members of your Board of Directors or General Manager Avram Patt with any questions about what this project will mean for you and your Co-op.

*Barry Bernstein is president of Washington Electric Cooperative's Board of Directors. Avram Patt is the Cooperative's general manager.*

