

WEC CO-OP CURRENTS

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

September 2005

Louisiana Bound WEC Workers Help Mend Katrina Devastation

In a narrow hallway in WEC's East Montpelier headquarters, Operations Director Dan Weston was saying goodbye to a three-man crew departing on a long journey. Stay in touch, he was telling them; use email, use the phone; let us know how things are going for you.

And take pictures. People are going to want to know what it was like down

there. Mike Myers said he had his wife's digital camera. Tim Pudvah was leaving his photographic equipment at home, but he and Ray Hall said they might pick up disposable cameras on the road. Dan admonished them again to be safe, and everyone shook hands.

At that, Mike, Tim and Ray, wearing jeans and T-shirts with the Washington



From left, Mike Myers, Raymond Hall and Tim Pudvah, WEC operations personnel, just before their departure for devastated Louisiana. They will be followed, in shifts, by other volunteers from Washington Electric.

Lighting their future....



Madeline and Thomas Conlogue, members of a Co-op family from Worcester, joined Gov. James Douglas, right, in a bulb-lighting ceremony (a replacement for ribbon cutting) at WEC's gathering in Coventry to celebrate our landfill gas-to-electricity generating plant. More photos of an eventful day are inside.

Electric Cooperative emblem, went out into the morning September rain, posed for a photo for *Co-op Currents*, then got into two WEC trucks and pulled away. Their destination: Amite, Louisiana, a small community 65 miles from New Orleans on the north side of Lake Pontchartrain (just north, too, of Montpelier, LA).

The drive would take a full 24 hours, and once there they would go to work with local linemen and others from electric co-ops around the country. Their goal was to restore power to the members of Washington-St. Tammany

Cooperative, whose territory had been brutalized by Hurricane Katrina.

In the aftermath of the storm – one of the worst natural disasters in U.S. history – Americans did what they could to ease the burdens of the citizens of Louisiana, Mississippi and other Gulf Coast states. In Vermont, people contributed more than 60 tractor-trailer loads of groceries, pet food, clothing, batteries, radios and other supplies; they donated to charities, and to radio stations running emergency-relief collections that raised hundreds of thousands of dollars. Volunteers

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Inside

YOU are the Co-op's eyes and ears – or so a Williamstown member discovered after she reported "sparking," and perhaps prevented a serious outage. Please follow her example. Story, page 3.

Fuel buyers groups report new WEC members after Co-op's "information campaign." Page 2.

Make your own electricity, with help getting started from new Vermont programs. Page 6.

Report from Louisiana. Our first crew lending aid sends back their impressions. Page 8.



Plant operator Scott Wilson, of IES, explains WEC's landfill gas-electric system at the Grand Opening on September 17. The story, in pictures, is on pages 4 and 5.

Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

Membership, And Costs, Have Climbed For Fuel Buyers Clubs

Urgent: SERG Members Should Double-Check

Local fuel buyers groups have completed their summer sign-ups, and report that interest has never been greater among residents in and around Washington Electric Co-op's service territory.

It makes sense. Fossil fuel price patterns have been downright scary, and residents could be looking at winter fuel bills a third or more higher than last year's. The pattern was set last summer (2004), when heating fuel prices failed to go down as normal between May and August.

Consumers waited in vain for the price to dip so they could "lock in" at a lower cost.

With the 2004 experience in mind, Washington Electric began late last winter informing its members about the local fuel buyers groups and suggesting that people call the groups to learn more.

"We consider our role to be broader than the obvious one of providing electricity and electric-related services," said Co-op President Barry Bernstein. "We try to provide information that can benefit our WEC members, especially in energy- and conservation-related issues. It's a part of our mission that we take very seriously."

Therefore, in March 2005 an article

in *Co-op Currents* explained how fuel buyers groups work, and provided the names and phone numbers of those active in our area: The Energy Co-op of Vermont, the

Ruth Clark Buying Group, the Vermont Fuel Buyers Association, and the SERG Energy Club. In June WEC included an insert in members' electric bills providing further information.

The effort bore fruit. Mike McGlynn of South Woodbury, who operates the Vermont Fuel Buyers Association, fielded many inquiries from Washington

Electric Co-op members. "[WEC is] to be acknowledged for trying to save their members money. I'm a lifelong Vermonter, and I always think we should be looking out for each other. I think the Co-op has been doing that."

Asked if she thought WEC's effort had generated calls to her buyers group, Ruth Clark of Williamstown said, "I know it did. Quite a few people said they'd heard about the club through Washington Electric." SERG Director Bob Walker agreed. "The outreach WEC did for us was very helpful."

This feedback is important to the Co-op as an indication that it is able to communicate important energy-related information that can help Co-op members.

Numbers up, but...

All three of the above buyers groups reported significant growth in membership this summer. McGlynn, whose Vermont Fuel Buyers Association coordinates purchases of fuel oil, propane and kerosene, said his membership has been doubling every year lately, but this summer, he said, "We more than doubled. We're going to hit 1,000, and have the potential of hitting 1,100 members."

By mid-September the group was not accepting more applications to purchase fuel oil, but was trying to secure more propane; if there were additional members, it would be for propane alone. The Vermont Fuel Buyers Association operates in all WEC towns except Barnet, Newbury, Peacham and West Fairlee.

Ruth Clark's group, which deals in fuel oil and kerosene, has experienced similar growth since the Williamstown real estate agent started her organization 10 years ago. She said her membership would exceed 1,000 this year. Clark's buyers group serves people in roughly half of WEC's towns and elsewhere in the state.

July and August were busy months for these supposedly "spare-time" group leaders. During peak periods they took calls all day long, registering new applicants and recording their fuel orders, then often worked past midnight updating their data. Their other role is to negotiate with dealers for a contract price and amount of fuel to be reserved for group members. Typically, groups require applicants to order some minimum number of gallons (500, for McGlynn's Vermont Fuel Buyers Association).

"The fuel dealers probably would rather not deal with us," said McGlynn, "but they have to because of the volume

of sales and the gallons we represent."

... prices up, too

There's power in numbers, but in the current market other forces are at play, too. Past pricing patterns were out the window from the start of the summer, and the havoc to the refining industry by late-summer hurricanes made things worse.

"With buyers groups, my job is basically to negotiate the price," said Irving Oil Sales Rep Marshall White. "They'll come to us and say 'Hey, we've got this many gallons [people want]; what would be your price?' We'd go back and look at the market and give them a price, and whether they took it or not was up to them."

"But this year there's no way for us to give any guidance, because it's not a year where you could go by history. From May until late summer you usually see lower prices, but this year they've just been going up. It got to the point where the groups had to live with it."

Ruth Clark concurs.

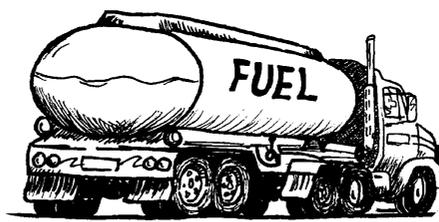
"It took me a long time to get over the fact that it was more than \$2 [per gallon]," she said. "I think those that did get in are going to be very relieved. Nobody knows, of course, but just knowing that they're set for the year provides a comfort level."

McGlynn, too, settled for comparatively high prices: fuel oil at \$2.049/gallon, and kerosene at \$2.32/gallon. His group also deals in propane, priced this year at \$1.37/gallon. (Those prices do not include the group's nickel-a-gallon surcharge.)

Wrinkle For SERG members

The Sustainable Energy Resource Group (SERG) – which, in WEC's territory, is active in Bradford, Chelsea, Corinth, Groton, Ryegate, Strafford, Topsham, Vershire and West Fairlee

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Co-op Currents

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WEC is part of the alliance working to advance and support the principles of cooperatives in Vermont.

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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.

Marketplace

FOR SALE: House in West Topsham on 10 acres with drive, private wooded setting (ideal for a camp). Three miles from store, post office, 20 miles from Bradford. Two bedrooms, large living room, kitchen-dining area; 1 bath. Full dirt-floor basement; wood and gas furnaces; gas stove and freezer. New artesian well; two-year-old sugarhouse with equipment; large pole barn. Cost: \$275,000. Call 426-3337, or 479-3544.

Do Everyone (And Yourself) A Favor: Report Trouble When You See It

The last thing Bette Godfrey would claim to be is a hero. But on Tuesday, September 13, Mrs. Godfrey, who lives on the Chelsea Road in Williamstown, committed an act that grateful WEC employees consider almost heroic: She picked up the phone.

She placed a call to the Co-op to report that she and her husband, Drex, had seen sparks coming from a utility pole near their home.

Here's what happened because Bette Godfrey called the Co-op:

- WEC sent a crew to inspect the problem, which resulted in a brief (20-minute), localized emergency shutdown while repairs were made; that spared some 300 Co-op members and their families an almost inevitable outage that could have lasted for hours and been a major inconvenience;
- Because the "arcing" the Godfreys saw could have set the pole on fire, a far more dangerous and expensive potential problem (paid for, in one way or another, by all Washington Electric Co-op members) was averted;
- A crew of linemen got a night's sleep, rather than (possibly) being summoned to an emergency outage at two o'clock in the morning. To them, and the families who care about them, that's huge.

Reporting something that is – or even just might be – amiss on the power system is something people commonly fail to do.

Mrs. Godfrey confessed that she waited a week or so after she first thought she had seen sparks to make the call.

"I had noticed something, but I wasn't positive," she said. "It was stormy and rainy. I thought I saw a spark coming from the

pole, but I wasn't sure; perhaps it was something on the pole or perhaps it was lights in the road."

A week or so later her husband was out walking the dog at night, and mentioned he had seen blue lights, "like electricity jumping," she recalled. Same side of the same pole.

She called WEC the next day.

"I said I didn't know if it was something or not, but I described it to them. They were very appreciative, and very informative, not only the woman who answered my call" (Plant Accountant and Dispatcher Cathie Vandenburg) "but everyone involved. They were great at letting me know when the crew would be here, what they

would be doing, when the power would be off and when it would be back on."

And it all went according to plan.

On the lookout for...

When she learned how helpful her call was, Mrs. Godfrey wished she had phoned sooner. The important thing to Dan Weston, WEC Director of Operations, is that she called, period.

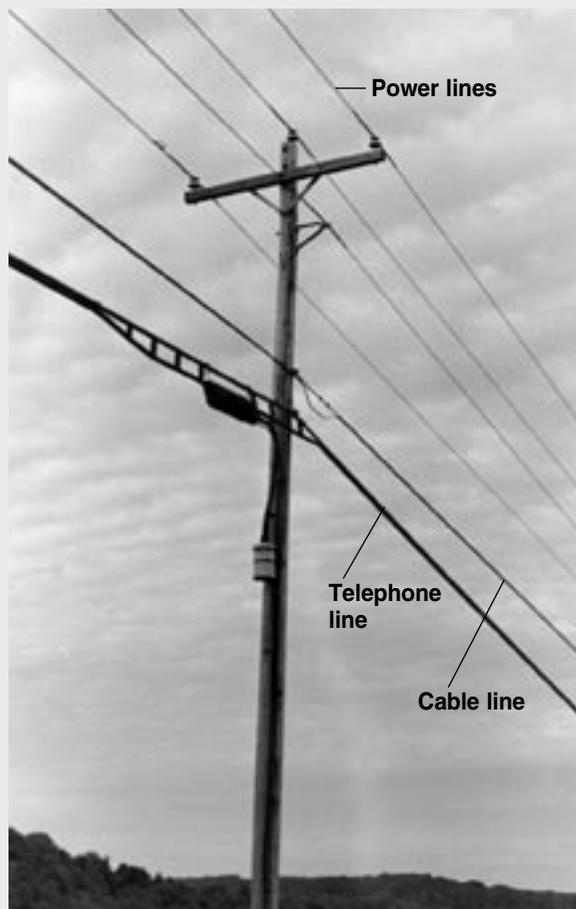
"It turned out to be an insulating part of the equipment that was, what we call, going to ground," he said, reiterating that it could have become a serious outage.

The point is that the entire Co-op – members as well as employees – would benefit greatly if people reported things they thought, or just suspected, might cause power problems.

"They are our eyes and ears," said Weston, referring to the members. "They see the power lines around them every day. We'd rather have people call with things that don't turn out to be problems than fail to report things we need to know about."

Some of the situations members might notice are these:

- **Trees, or even branches, coming in contact with the wires.** This is an outage waiting to happen (or may be happening already). "Under no circumstances do we want people to cut the trees off the wires themselves," Weston emphasized. "The wires are energized, and that's very dangerous. We actually have had people do that."
- **Leaning poles.** Utility poles ideally stand upright, perpendicular to the ground. They must withstand pressure from rain, ice and wind, and the tug from side taps or lines following curves in the road. Some poles are secured with guy wires. If members spy poles that look like the Leaning Tower of Pisa, they should call the Co-op immediately.



Knowing what's on a utility pole helps you know which company to call if you see trouble. But most important is that you call **someone**.

- **Sagging wires.** The wires (conductors) cannot be taut; they must sag somewhat. The correct sag is built in during system construction and maintenance. But when weather, age or some other cause creates too much sag in the lines it can be dangerous. For example, trucks might catch the wires. It also makes power delivery inefficient and more costly.

- **Sparks, or glowing.** "If that happens, something's amiss," said Weston. "Nothing should be glowing but people's lights."

There are also the obvious problems, such as downed power lines or outdoor lighting that's gone dark. Don't assume WEC knows about problems you see; call to report them; it might save everyone time, money and great inconvenience.

Who's who, what's where?

There's one more thing. It helps when people know which wires on the utility poles are the electric wires.

"This is how the system – our system and every system – is set up," Weston explained. "The electric wires are on the top. It could be one wire, with a neutral wire running just a little below, or it could be three parallel wires (with a neutral). In any case, they're the ones at the top of the pole."

"The next thing down is a much thicker wire. It's the cable company. Of course, not all rural areas have cable service. Then below that, also larger than the electric wires, is the telephone service."

It's best for people to know the difference so they know who to call if they spot problems. If WEC investigates a report of a tree leaning against the wires and finds that it's leaning on the telephone cable, the linemen must then call the phone company. It would be more efficient to avoid that step.

"But more important than that is that people call when they think something might be wrong," said Weston. "It's better to be safe than sorry."

Fuel Buyers Clubs

continued from page 2

– has had unusual problems this buying season, putting in jeopardy the expected purchases and prices of some who signed up. (The fuel buying function is actually performed by a related organization, the Upper Valley Energy Group, or UVEG, which hires SERG Director Bob Walker to run it.)

WEC members in those towns who arrived at fuel-purchasing agreements with Bradford Oil/Pratt's Propane

through the services of SERG/UVEG should make sure their agreements with the company are valid.

Walker explained that the problems arose after another company bought the fuel distributorship the group has always used. "They told us that the amount of fuel they had preordered for pre-buy and budget plans had all been bought up, and they could afford to buy about half of the fuel ordered by the people who had signed up with us."

For the people who find themselves excluded, Walker said the company had

offered a higher price that some will be less able to afford.

"Probably about 100 members may be affected," he said. "These would be people whose contracts were not signed and returned with payment before August 31. If any Co-op member who signed up to buy from Pratt's, either with us or without us, has not received confirmation, they ought to get on the phone with Pratt's to make sure they are all set."

For the most part, fortunately, members of the buyers groups find

themselves in the position of having their heating concerns for the coming winter already resolved. Yet, prices have increased. **That's why WEC suggests that its members consider the limited-time offer for a Home Performance evaluation from EVT and ENERGY STAR described on page 7.** Because the other thing people can do, besides trying to control their costs by pre-buying or joining a buyers group, is to reduce their consumption of fuel through conservation and technology.



A Day to Remember

It had the flair of a good old camp meeting – a jovial gathering of folks under a wide tent, praising something they truly believed in. But in this case the subject was renewable (and affordable) electric energy, and the site was Washington Electric Cooperative's new \$8 million, 4.8-megawatt landfill gas-to-electric generating station, constructed in Coventry beside the state's largest landfill, owned by Cassella Waste Management Inc. Though in operation since early July, WEC set aside Saturday, September 17 for the plant's GRAND OPENING, and hundreds of people showed up!

Photos, this page; clockwise from top left: Co-op members arrived by bus, car, and pulled by pups; rain threatened, so a tent was needed; the next photo shows it could barely hold the crowd that assembled; WEC Manager Avram Patt was Master of Ceremonies; Poet, teacher, humorist and Co-op member Geof Hewitt (checked shirt) recited an original poem, titled "Needs," written for the occasion (you can read the poem on WEC's website; it will be published in the October issue of *Co-op Currents*); U.S. Rep. Bernard Sanders said that by using methane to fuel electric generators WEC was setting a needed example for the country; and Cassella President John Cassella

(center), whose company is WEC's partner in the venture, called it one of the most exciting events in his 30 years in waste management.

Photos, opposite page, clockwise from top left: The closing event, a symbolic lighting of an electric bulb by young Madeline and Thomas Conlogue of Worcester, with (from left) Dorothy and Gov. James Douglas, Rep. Bernard Sanders, WEC Manager Avram Patt, State Sen. Vince Illuzzi (R/Essex-Orleans), WEC President Barry Bernstein, and Jolinda LaClair of U.S. Dept. of Agriculture; Former WEC Manager Joe Bongiovanni chats outside the tent; WEC President Bernstein poses for a photo with LaClair, who is State Director of USDA Rural Development; Amy Darley of Sen. James Jeffords' office, with Mrs. Douglas; The generating plant as seen from the top of the landfill; Inside the plant, folks take a walking tour of the generating room.

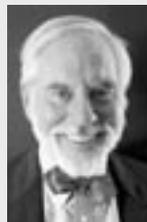




WEC Board of Directors

Washington Electric Cooperative's "Coventry project" required an unusual degree of commitment, supervision and decision-making by the Board of Directors over a three-year period.

"I wish to thank my fellow Board members, whose hard work and belief in this project led to its ultimate successful conclusion," said Board President Barry Bernstein.



From left: Roger Fox, Don Douglas, Kimberly Cheney, Wendell Cilley, Roy Folsom, Timothy Guiles, Marion Milne, and Richard Rubin

Thanks also go to recently retired Board members for their participation:
Charles "Bud" Haas, Monique Hayden, and Carla Payne



Helping You Get Started

Vermont's New Resources For Small Wind, Solar Projects

With our eyes on the “big” prizes – in-state, commercial-scale electric-generation projects that could yield megawatts of renewable power for Vermont’s energy diet – we may sometimes overlook the opportunities that exist for homeowners and businesses, and even schools and municipalities, to take matters into their own hands. However, two projects recently underway – the Vermont Anemometer Loan Program and the Vermont Solar and Wind Incentive Program – are now available to help folks get started.

The first step for developing small-scale wind electric projects is to determine the generating potential of a prospective site. The Vermont Anemometer Loan Program (VTALP) provides the instrumentation and technology for that purpose.



A temporary tower, equipped with wind-measurement technology, takes readings at a potential wind-turbine site.

It also provides another, invaluable, kind of energy: the energy of eager VTC (Vermont Technical College) students and faculty, who install the equipment, collect and analyze the data, and provide a “resource report” for the potential site. The property owner is responsible for the equipment while it is in place – a period of up to 12 months – and must secure any necessary permits.

VTALP got underway in July. It has now installed two anemometer towers and has the equipment available to install up to five more. The first installations are at the Wayside Farm, an organic dairy farm in Randolph Center, and the Marlboro Elementary School.

To learn more about the Vermont Anemometer Loan

Program, contact Vermont Technical College in Randolph. Information and application forms are also available online at <http://web.vtc.edu/users/jnk06190/VTALP/>.

The second new resource – actually a renewed resource – for small-scale renewable generation is the Vermont Solar and Small Wind Incentive Program. It is the second stage of a program initiated by the state Legislature and signed into law by Gov. James Douglas in 2003. This one, interestingly, is an economic-development program; by stimulating interest in solar electric and hot water systems and small-scale wind installations, its goal is to increase market demand for the services provided by Vermont’s burgeoning renewable-power industry.

Funding for the program comes from state and federal sources (and, in their service territories, Central Vermont Public Service and Green Mountain Power). It is administered, with support services, by the Renewable Energy Resource Center (RERC), a project of the Vermont Energy Investment Corporation (VEIC).

Geared toward homes, businesses, schools and municipalities, the Vermont

Solar and Small Wind Incentive Program awards grants, which recipients then use to leverage additional monies for the projects. The incentive grants cover 25 percent of projected costs.

This approach has proved itself. In the first two-year round of funding the program provided a total of some \$840,000, which helped to create more than 200 renewable energy systems.

The second round, now underway, is expected to leverage \$3 million in private investments for up to 250 solar electric, solar hot water, and small wind systems. These will translate into direct benefits not only for users and for the renewable energy industry, but for Vermont’s energy picture. The program is expected to decrease fuel oil usage by 17,000 gallons per year, and offset 540 megawatt hours (MWh) of grid-provided electricity.

Information on eligibility, incentive amounts and other details of the Vermont Solar and Small Wind Incentive Program can be found at www.rerc-vt.org/incentives/faq.htm, or by contacting VEIC in Burlington. Washington Electric Co-op members interested in learning more about both these programs are invited to start by calling Products and Services Director Bill Powell.

Louisiana Bound

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registered with the Red Cross for assignments in the stricken areas.

Washington Electric Co-op contributed linemen – or, more accurately, they contributed themselves. In collaboration with New Hampshire Electric Cooperative and Vermont Electric Co-op in Johnson, WEC sent skilled workers to help put back together rural electric systems that had been wrecked by the storm. Hundreds of thousands of poles were on the ground, wire was tangled up in broken, uprooted trees, substations were damaged and inoperative. Millions of people – and schools and hospitals, offices and businesses – were without power, which is no mere luxury but a necessity of life in the 21st century.

Asked why he had volunteered for the trip, WEC Foreman Tim Pudvah said all that could be said: “To do what we can to help those people down there.”

A team effort with WEC, NHEC

It’s standard operating procedure for electric utilities to help each other after events that cause unusually heavy outages. The system is called mutual aid. Electric co-ops are regulated by the federal Rural Utilities Service (RUS), and are required to meet fairly uniform construction and equipment standards nationwide. This makes it easy for line workers from one co-op to pitch in to repair or reconstruct another co-op’s distribution system (although regional conditions, such as ocean winds in coastal areas and ice buildup in northern climates, impose some differences).

When a part of the country suffers some form

of disaster, it’s almost reflexive for co-ops near and far to ponder how they can help. But principle overrides the co-op connection.

“These are people down there,” said WEC’s Dan Weston. “I don’t care what

kind of utility they’re served by.”

In states with many consumer-owned electric co-ops, efforts in aid are coordinated by statewide associations that provide for the common interests of their member co-ops. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina the Louisiana and Mississippi “statewides,” as they are called, were immediately in communication with statewides elsewhere, seeking emergency assistance.

It’s somewhat harder for co-ops from states like Vermont, which has no statewide cooperative association, to get involved. Rather than waiting to be asked, they

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Building line is building line, and WEC Foreman Tim Pudvah, shown here at work in Vermont, is doing plenty of it in Louisiana.



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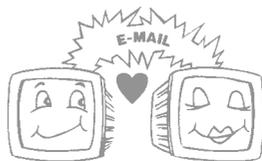
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Louisiana Bound

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need to volunteer. For WEC, it began with a call from Henry Lynch, manager of disaster recovery for New Hampshire Electric Cooperative (NHEC).

"Henry asked, would we have any interest in trying to coordinate a joint effort, maybe along with VEC (Vermont Electric Cooperative)," said Weston. "I said, yeah, we'd have an interest.

"But the things that go through your head," he continued. "It's summer, but you know what? In the utility world, we're thinking we're heading into fall, which is storm season. So any help we can provide, we would have to be down and back prior to the onslaught of fall rainstorms and the anticipated outages we will have. We're not looking to send any help elsewhere if our people are desperately needed here."

The cooperative framework helps arrange emergency aid, but the principle overrides the co-op connection. "These are people down there," said Dan Weston. "I don't care what kind of utility they're served by."

With the blessing of Manager Avram Patt and WEC's Board of Directors, Weston approached the linemen and other operations workers.

"I explained the situation down there as I understood it, explained that we could afford at this point to send crews down in two-week increments, with one Washington Electric crew spelling the previous one, and explained what would be expected. I'm not familiar with Louisiana," said the Warren, Vermont, native, "but unless that area gets a massive influx of help they're not going to be ready when whatever their definition of winter is hits them."

Several employees volunteered. Weston organized a rotation that started, on September 15, with Pudvah, Myers and Hall driving down; around October 1 they would fly home and a second crew – Linemen Mark Maloney and Ed Schunk, and Senior Field Technician Brent Lilley – would fly south to replace them. If there was time for a third rotation before WEC needed all its personnel home, it would consist of Foreman Bob Fair, Lineman Phil Poulin and Field Technician Mike Patterson. (The linemen in each crew are licensed and trained for climbing and construction; the technicians – including Right-of-Way Management Coordinator Mike Myers in the first crew – function as "groundmen," assisting the line workers and preparing poles and hardware for assembly.)

The final WEC crew in Louisiana – whether it's the second or third shift – will drive the trucks home.

"They will be working in a rural area

like ours," said Weston. "There's not the flood damage and inundation we see in the news. It's a treed, rural environment similar to what our crews work in every day, which basically got knocked flat by high winds; a lot of broken poles and downed trees and power line. They're going to go down and build line."

The accommodations would be

adequate, but little more: cots and sleeping bags in a gymnasium, catered food-service-type meals." Lots of work. The reward that comes from knowing you have something to offer, and gave help when it was needed.

'We had to do something'

The first of the three northern New



Mike, Raymond and Tim (from left) report bugs, heat, long hours of work, and sincere gratitude from the folks they are helping.

Louisiana Diary

Since arriving in Amite, Louisiana, WEC's Tim Pudvah, Raymond Hall and Mike Myers have kept in touch with the folks at home. The following reports were posted by Operations Director Dan Weston after speaking with them.

Monday, September 19

The crew arrived Saturday morning (September 17). They have thus far been involved with setting poles and running in new overhead services to homes. In their words, "the trim crews cut the trees up and a bulldozer comes along and pushes all the debris to the sides of the right-of-way. The poles are then set and new services are run in." They have indicated that the infrastructure is indeed "flat" and in need of a total rebuild. The crew is being housed in a golf "Club House", sleeping on cots. It is air conditioned and is a step up from the giant "tent city" that is in place for many of the crews providing assistance. Their day begins at 5 a.m. with a shower and a half-hour ride to the stock room where they load material for the day. They have breakfast and are on the job at around 7 a.m. They have packed lunches to eat during the day and are back in to eat at around 7 p.m. They eat, unload retired material, and drive back to the Club House. Mike Myers commented that they were unprepared for the overwhelming heat. Apparently the "Love Bug" is in full swarm and in a matter of minutes the windshields are covered with splattered bugs making driving a nuisance. They were in excellent spirits when I spoke with them this morning and were certainly excited about the experience.

Friday, September 23

There is an apprehension building over the possibility of the newest hurricane, Rita, and its projected path. As of this morning at 5:30 the crew in Louisiana was loading poles and working alongside the crews from VEC. The weather was "clear and nice." They had a meeting with their field supervisor and they have been instructed to return from the field when the rain starts. They were also told that the best forecast for their specific area included 30-mph winds and as much as 3 inches of rain. Nearly half of the workers have pulled out and headed for Texas in advance of Rita. They have been working 16 hour days, 7 days a week and have been extremely well received by the local co-op members. In Tim's words, "everywhere we go they want to barbeque a meal for us." They have been stripping hardware off old poles in order to frame the new poles that have been installed. Getting new poles was a problem, but now a large shipment has arrived. The food is reported as being "excellent." The crew is in excellent spirits and appears to be experiencing a unique level of gratification over being able to see on an everyday basis the difference they are able to make as they restore power to very appreciative people. Tim, Raymond and Mike are scheduled to fly back to Vermont next Saturday (October 1), and Mark, Brent and Ed are scheduled to meet the crew at the New Orleans airport to replace them. The following week's weather here in the northeast is predicted to remain stable and we are keeping up with all necessary in-house work.

England co-ops to actually get personnel on the scene was Vermont Electric Cooperative of Johnson. WEC's "sister co-op" is assisting the same Louisiana cooperative as Washington Electric.

"We had two crews leave at 6 a.m. on Saturday (September 10)," said VEC's Chief Operations Officer, Dan Poulin. "This is a busy time for us. A lot of people are trying to get their projects done before winter [meaning, construction projects in advance of VEC's connecting them for electric power]. We're approaching storm season ourselves, and plus, a large contingent of our linemen hunt. So it's a tricky time to provide assistance, but we felt we had to do something."

Ironically, New Hampshire Electric Co-op, which originated the idea of a convoy of NHEC, WEC and VEC trucks and linemen, may end up not participating. NHEC had been teamed up with a receiving co-op in Mississippi rather than Louisiana,

"We have crews and supervisors that we could mobilize in two days," said New Hampshire's Henry Lynch. "But when I talked to Mississippi [recently] they were optimistic that they were going to be in good shape. My feeling is that if Mississippi is clearing up there are going to be a large number of line-construction contractors that will migrate to Louisiana."

If so, it might mean a shorter stay for WEC and VEC personnel. On the other hand, Hurricane Rita, which struck western Louisiana and Texas, might have something to say about that.

Costs for WEC's efforts will be reimbursed by the receiving co-op in Louisiana, which eventually will receive disaster-relief money from FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency. It may seem improbable that a rural electric co-op could be prepared to foot the enormous bill that will result from Katrina's destruction, but the system works on lines of credit – primarily with RUS and the Cooperative Finance Corp.

"If our system was flat," said Weston, "we'd have the monies available. They have to have a storm-restoration plan, like anybody, even if this one may break the bank."

"We are glad to help out," said WEC Manager Avram Patt. "We're smaller than the co-op we're assisting but co-ops of all sizes are sending help, including ones smaller than WEC."

Washington Electric has both provided and received mutual aid after particularly destructive storms have hit Vermont. But Patt was cognizant of the difference in this historic circumstance.

"The worst natural disasters that ever hit us pale by comparison to Category 4 or 5 hurricanes," he said. "In a situation like this, you do what you can to help. I'm very proud of our people who have stepped up to give those folks a hand. We will welcome them home with gratitude." 