



UN Launches a Yearlong Celebration of Cooperatives

Nearly three years in the making, the International Year of Cooperatives ("IYC 2012") has arrived. The United Nations General Assembly approved the designation in

2009, using the slogan, "Cooperative Enterprises Build a Better World."

Co-ops of all sorts are taking notice, celebrating this global recognition of their form of enterprise often by praising others who conduct their business in the same democratic and egalitarian manner. An example in central Vermont is the Hunger Mountain Food Co-op in Montpelier, which will highlight a local cooperative in each 2012 issue of its newsletter, *The Full Scoop*. Its March/April issue featured Washington Electric Cooperative, with an interview with WEC General Manager Avram Patt. Cabot Cooperative Creamery reportedly is planning a 2,300-mile "cooperative ride, walk, and bike tour in 15 eastern states" and other community events this summer. At WEC, we will present a variety of features in *Co-op Currents* during the year, with a banner on the front page of each 2012 issue.

The National Rural Electric

"A perfect venue to contrast how we differ from profit-driven companies"

— NRECA CEO
Glenn English

Cooperative Association (NRECA), the Arlington, Virginia-based organization that represents the nation's 900-plus electric co-ops, launched 2012 with

a cover story in the January issue of *RE Magazine* titled, "The Year of Living Cooperatively."

The UN resolution, the magazine reported, "recognizes the vital role cooperatives – democratically governed businesses that operate on an at-cost, not-for-profit basis – play in the economic and social well-being of nations around the globe. It also encourages countries to foster cooperative development as a way to generate local wealth, employment, and marketplace competition."

The article then quoted NRECA CEO Glenn English, saying, "At a time when folks are losing faith in big corporations, the International Year of Cooperatives 2012 offers us a great opportunity to showcase many ways the local, consumer-owned, and member-controlled cooperative form of business benefits communities all over the world. It gives cooperatives a perfect

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This abandoned mill on the Waits River, covered in snow even recently, played a part in the bobbin mill industry that once employed many Vermonters, including Guy Allen. His son Chester lives across the road.

Remembering The REA In West Topsham

(There's Only One Old Relic on Guy Allen Road, and it's Not Chet)

Chester and Natalie Allen live on a small road in the woods beside a quiet, nearly hidden, section of the Waits River in West Topsham. There is the only house on Guy Allen Road, which like so many rural Vermont roadways was named for an early inhabitant, Chester's (Chet's) father.

It wasn't always so quiet down here. Just across from the Allens' house are the ruins of a mill that once employed workers turning out the wooden blocks for bobbins, which were then shipped and finished by the Bowen Hunter Bobbin Mill in East Corinth. The West Topsham mill closed after

a fire destroyed the mill in East Corinth in 1967. Next to its ruins are the abutments of what used to be a bridge leading to the village of West Topsham, just up the steep embankment on the other side of the river. These days the remains of the mill are shrouded in snow in the winter and overgrowth in the summer. There's a lot of history in villages like West Topsham, but you have to know where to look for it.

Besides the mill, another source of history on Guy Allen Road is Chet himself. Ninety years old this April, Chet Allen has not only seen a lot, he's done a lot – and that

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Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

Inside

Three candidates for your Board of Directors. It's time to start gearing up for WEC's Annual Meeting in May, and that means an election for three positions on the Board. Three candidates are running this year, and they are introduced on page 4.

If you're thinking of building or renovating you need to keep Vermont's Residential Energy Standards in mind. They were updated last fall, and the state promises stricter enforcement. See page 5.

Tropical Storm Irene provided an excellent, and unusual, use for WEC Community Fund donations in 2011. See our annual Community Fund report on page 7.

Smart metering, Yankee, mergers... The energy landscape is changing in Vermont, and for its utilities, including WEC. Co-op President Barry Bernstein helps us keep up. Page 2.



Chet Allen helped build the lines that made the Co-op, and he built a business, too. His story continues on page 3.

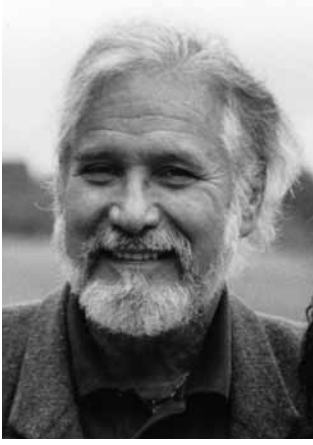
President's Message

Weighty Matters Before The Public Service Board

And Other Observations as Spring Comes Early to Co-op Members

By Barry Bernstein

It's been a strange winter, and we are now seeing a mid-to-late-March with temperatures in the 70s and snow remaining pretty much only in the woods. My friends who are sugaring are wondering if it will be an early end to this year's season. As we all know, it may be too soon to put away the heavy sweaters, as April often brings an "unexpected" snowfall or two. The last time I can remember winter ending by March was the mid 1970s.



power outages starting at 4:30 a.m. and was not finally fixed until early afternoon. (Our South Walden substation is served by GMP transmission lines.) Fortunately, once WEC became aware that the problem was on Green Mountain's transmission corridor, our crews were able to back-feed

power from other WEC substations temporarily, until GMP could correct the situation.

Office renovation

As March comes to a close, 10 months since our East Montpelier office building was flooded last May, the crew and subcontractors for LK Rossi Construction – owned by a Co-op member – are getting closer to the finish line on the building's renovations. The new windows and main entrance are now in place, and we hope to be able to move staff back in by the end of April. As you drive by in the next few weeks you will be able to see the new

siding going up on the outside.

GMP/CVPS merger

The technical hearing on one of the most significant event in Vermont's electric utility history – the consolidation of Vermont's two largest investor-owned electric companies, Green Mountain Power and Central Vermont Public Service Corp. – starts on March 21 and will go through April 4.

As we have reported in *Co-op Currents*, the WEC Board has focused its concern on the ownership and control of VELCO – the Vermont Electric Power Company, which controls the transmission lines over which all wholesale power must flow coming into the state. WEC has been advocating for a strong look at public ownership of this vital asset, or at a minimum, the addition of "public good directors" on VELCO's board, as has been advocated by the Vermont Department of Public Service (DPS). Furthermore, both the DPS and Washington Electric have requested expanding the number of seats for public utility directors on VELCO's board (presently, WEC is not represented). State Sen. Vince Illuzzi, R-Orleans, has been a strong advocate for 51-percent state ownership of VELCO.

The final decision on the merger proposal, and the constitution of VELCO'S Board of Directors and other potential conditions if a merger is approved, will be made by the Vermont Public Service Board (PSB) sometime this summer.

PSB: Vermont Yankee; "Smart Metering"; WEC rate case

Vermont Yankee – The PSB has its hands full, as it must make major decisions not only on the GMP-CVPS merger but also on issues concerning Entergy's Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant. When Federal Judge Garvin Murtha ruled in January that the Vermont Legislature did not have the right to deny relicensing of the plant for another 20 years, he left a number of issues in the jurisdiction of the PSB that still must be decided. The Vermont attorney general has announced that he is going to appeal Judge Murtha's decision, so the question of how long the plant will operate past its 40-year license – which reached its end date on March 21 – is still unanswered.

Smart metering – Meanwhile, WEC is also waiting PSB approval of its

Alan Betts, Vermont's leading climate scientist, will be the guest speaker at our Annual Meeting, addressing WEC members on the impact of climate change on Vermont.

application, supported by the Department of Public Service, to begin installation of our Automated Metering Infrastructure (AMI), which is commonly known as smart metering. PSB approval will allow us to install new digital electric meters at all of our member

locations. The Co-op will be using a power line carrier (PLC) system – or, put another way, a "wired" system as opposed to the "wireless" systems many other Vermont utilities plan to install. We have spoken about this at our community meetings and in *Co-op Currents*, and will continue to provide lots of information on this subject for our members.


Our plan is to have all of the Co-op's nearly 11,000 meters in place by April 2013, including those at our substations. This will enable us to better pinpoint the extent and exact location of member outages during major and minor storms, and that means we can more efficiently mobilize our line crews, and also crews from other utilities that may come to our aid during outages. We also expect that we will be able to provide more accurate and precise information on our web site, and other social media sites such as Facebook, in the future.

WEC rate case – We hope to reach agreement with the DPS on our pending rate case request of a 2.27-percent increase shortly. Agreement with the DPS will mean we can move forward with seeking PSB approval of this matter.

Annual Meeting

I would like to encourage our members to join us at WEC'S 73rd Annual Meeting, on May 24, where our guest speaker will be Alan Betts, Vermont's leading climate scientist. The subject of Betts' address will be the impact of climate change on Vermont. Given the weather of the last decade and the last 12 months, we hope this will be a topic all of our members will be interested in.

We are also planning a presentation by WEC staff on AMI – the Co-op's move to a "smart-metering" system. We previewed the subject at our community meetings in last October. It's a significant one for all of our members. Between these two topics, we're looking forward to an interesting and well-attended Annual Meeting, and hope to see you there.

Happy spring. 

GMP transmission outage

Town Meeting Day – Tuesday, March 6, with its bright blue sky and sunshine – brought an unexpected surprise: loss of power to nearly 1,400 of our members served by our South Walden substation. The outage also affected most customers of the Hardwick Electric Department.

A problem on Green Mountain Power's transmission system caused

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.

Remembering The REA In West Topsham

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Natalie and Chet Allen of West Topsham.

includes helping to string the first power lines through this part of Washington Electric Cooperative's service territory back when the Co-op was getting organized in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Like others of his generation, who remember the transformation of the rural countryside from an area dimly lit at nighttime by oil lamps (with occasional generators here and there) to one where homes and farmsteads glowed like stars interspersed on the dark hillsides thanks to the glare of electric bulbs, Chet still refers to those early electric endeavors as the work of the REA.

And that's exactly what it was. The Rural Electrification Administration, created by the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration, provided a funding source that enabled rural Americans to form cooperatives that would qualify for federal assistance; the co-ops could then build electric-distribution systems so that rural areas could have power the same as cities and towns, which were served by investor-owned utilities.

Chet, in fact, was born in such a town: Bradford, Vermont, farther east in Orange County, had electricity for most of its residents which was generated by a local power station. But when Chet was a youngster, Guy Allen moved the family to West Topsham.

"There were some Delco systems around," Chet remembers, referring to the generator-and-battery systems that were a means of providing electricity for rural people who could afford them. "Lloyd Sweet had one. But people here didn't really have lights until Russell Bagley put together a crew under the direction of this guy who worked for the REA out of New York."

It's unclear who the New York REA organizer was (if anyone knows, contact us at *Co-op Currents*), but Russell Bagley was a well-known local man in West Topsham (he later served as Orange County sheriff), and when he let it be known he was looking for workers to extend power lines up Route 25 a young Chet Allen wasn't shy about signing up.

"I was a kid," he recalls, "but you could work kids back then. Heck, I was cutting brush and anything else I could find to do when I was 10 or 12 years old."

"You were working then?" Natalie pipes up, surprised.

"Sure," Chet answers vigorously.

He was probably closer to 17 when the REA work came through the Topsham area. President Roosevelt founded the REA in 1935 and Congress approved funding the following year, but it then took time for co-ops around the country to get organized, so a great many electric cooperatives established their charters in the late 1930s – WEC,

in 1939.

Chet recalls digging the holes for the power poles by hand and working with a crew of other men to stand the poles up vertically.

"It was all hand done in those days," he says, "not by machines." He also remembers "putting on hooks" and climbing the poles – which Washington Electric's linemen still do because WEC has miles of power line off the road and inaccessible to bucket trucks.

It turned out that this early exposure to the REA electric system was a taste of things to come for Chet Allen, who later founded a company that installed electric water heaters and refrigeration systems in many supermarkets and other businesses in central Vermont.

Before that, though, there was the matter of World War II. Chet spent five years in the U.S. Navy, serving in the amphibious forces both in the Mediterranean and Pacific theaters. "We took all the boys ashore and then got the hell out," he jokes. But it was risky business, and he remembers landing the Marines at Okinawa at eight in the morning when U.S. forces invaded in 1945. "We were ready to go to Japan after that," he says, "but they dropped the bomb and we came home."

Discharged in 1946, Chet used the GI Bill to enroll in a YMCA Trade & Technical School in New York City. "It was right across the road from Central Park," he recalls.

"Then once you must have been a city boy!" exclaims Natalie. (Natalie and Chet both were both previously married and have families of their own, but they were also schoolmates long ago at Bradford Academy.)


"Well I was!" Chet replies.

Upon returning to Vermont, the industrious young man started the Allen Refrigeration Company in Bradford. By now most of central Vermont was electrified, and the company

she says proudly. Natalie has a niece, Carmen, who is married to WEC's veteran construction foreman, Tim Pudvah.

After retirement, the couple spent 11 years in Florida, as well as time in Hilton Head, South Carolina. But for Chet, the house on Guy Allen, which his father had purchased from the bobbin mill company and where his parents lived for more than half a century, still beckoned.

On April 23, the same day William Shakespeare would turn 448, Chet Allen will be 90. The difference, of course, is that Chet is spry

and lively. He's in far better shape than the old mill he can see from his front window – a symbol of how things come and go, but leave their imprint in small, quiet Vermont villages which now have electric power, just like New York City. Thanks to people like Chet. 

had a lot of work, as Chet recalls it, installing electric equipment at farms, at the banks in Barre, at Harry's (the once-iconic Vermont department store on the Barre-Montpelier Road), and elsewhere.

Meanwhile, Natalie was raising her family – "Five children in seven years,"

Right of Way Reclearing Projects

Affected Members with 'Special Trees' Should Call the Co-op

The Co-op will continue working to improve service reliability by reclearing power-line rights of way in the areas described below. Right-of-way reclearing normally involves removing trees and pruning vegetation for 15 feet on either side of a single-phase distribution line, and for 25 feet on either side of a three-phase main distribution line. Except where noted, all of these projects involve single-phase lines, those carried by poles without cross-bars. Reclearing projects often involve a tap. That's where a single-phase line takes power from another line.

Throughout the year, post cards are mailed to members notifying them that right-of-way maintenance is to take place. Also, WEC's automated message-delivery system will place a phone call (if a phone number is on file) to all households affected by such maintenance projects, up to two or three weeks before work on the property is to begin. Calls will be placed in the evening, when most members are likely to be home. If no one answers, Co-op staff will attempt to reach that member during the day.

Because the evening calls are automated, they cannot hold the line if, for example, a child answers. If you believe you may have received a call from WEC, please call during office hours to check. If you are notified that a portion of your property is to be recleared and you especially hope to save any particular trees that are within the right-of-way, call the Co-op.

The Co-op's Right-of-way Management Coordinator Mike Myers, also a forester, will be happy to talk with you about any problems.

Reclearing Projects Scheduled for Summer 2012:

Cabot	Blodgett Road
Calais	Bayne Camolli Road
Calais	County Road north of Maple Corners
Calais	Max Gray, East Hill, Luce and Marshfield Roads
Calais	Robison and Apple Hill Roads
Chelsea	Upper Village and Corinth Road
Corinth	Chelsea Road
Orange	Fish Pond Road and Rock Place
Orange	Helgesen Road
Orange/Topsham	Tap off of Route 25 at the Orange and Topsham town line
Marshfield	Hollister Hill, Beaver Meadow and Pike Cemetery Road
Northfield/Roxbury	Messier Road
Topsham	Honey Corners Road
Vershire	Goose Green Road
Vershire	Mclver Road
Washington	Scales Hill and Clermont Road
Williamstown	tap to Limehurst trailer park
Woodbury	Bliss Road

2012 Annual Meeting Set for May 24 at Montpelier Elks Club

Three Candidates for WEC's Board of Directors


Three member/owners of Washington Electric Cooperative have come forward as candidates for the Co-op's Board of Directors in 2012. If elected, each will serve for three years, their terms ending in 2015.

Every year three seats on WEC's nine-member board expire, providing the membership an opportunity to elect one-third of the board that makes leadership decisions for the customer-owned electric utility, and oversees management and staff. This year the directors whose terms will expire at the time of the Annual Membership Meeting (they remain board members until that event) are **Roger Fox** of **Walden**, **Richard Rubin** of **Plainfield**, and **Scott Skinner** of **Middlesex**. Two of these incumbent directors, Roger Fox and Richard Rubin, are seeking re-election to the Board. Director Scott Skinner has chosen not to run for a new term. The third candidate, however, is **Mary Just Skinner**, also of Middlesex, who is married to Scott.

The election of directors is performed by ballots sent to each Washington Electric Cooperative member by mail in the weeks prior to the Annual Meeting. **When your ballot arrives, check the accompanying materials to determine when the deadline is for posting your votes by mail.** Members who attend the Annual Meeting can vote there if they wish, rather than by mail.

The meeting, which includes dinner, will be held at the Montpelier Elks Club. Reservations are required for dinner, but not for the meeting itself. A dinner-registration coupon can be found on page 8 of this issue of *Co-op Currents*, and will be included in the next (April) edition as well. The date of the 73rd Annual Washington Electric Cooperative Membership Meeting is Thursday evening, May 24. A schedule of events will appear on page one of the next issue, which is the official Annual Meeting issue, of *Co-op Currents*.

Voters who choose to do so can write in the names of other Co-op members who are not official candidates on their ballot. Board candidates run at-large because Washington Electric Cooperative is not divided into districts.

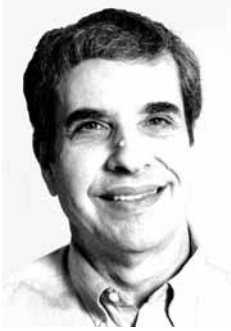
Printed below are brief biographical sketches submitted by the candidates, in which they introduce themselves and provide information on their background and involvement with the Cooperative and other avenues of community service. The April "Annual Meeting" issue of *Co-op Currents* will feature their responses to questions about issues related to board service. It will provide readers a broader sense of the interests, viewpoints, and experience of the candidates. 

Roger Fox

Residence:

I live at Dows Crossing in Walden, in the northern part of WEC's service territory, and have been a Co-op member in Walden

since 1971. You can contact me by mail at 2067 Bayley-Hazen Road, East Hardwick, VT 05836; by phone at 563-2321; or by e-mail at rfox@pivot.net.



Education/Profession: I have a bachelor's engineering degree from M.I.T., and I worked on aerospace engineering projects in Florida and Massachusetts prior to becoming a Vermonter. Since 1974, I've operated a printing and graphic design business, Apocalypse Graphics, in Walden.

Community Service/WEC: I currently serve as Walden's town moderator, and as a justice of the peace and chair of the Board of Civil Authority. I've previously served as selectman and town energy coordinator. I'm a member or patron of several other Vermont cooperatives, including Buffalo Mountain Food Co-op, Vermont State Employees Credit Union, North Country Federal Credit Union, Opportunities Credit Union, and Co-operative Insurance.

I was first elected to the WEC board in 1991, and have served as the Co-op's vice president since 1998,

and previously as secretary. My current assignments include chairing the Members & Markets and Evaluation committees, and membership on the Finance & Administration and Policy committees. Previously I served on the Power & Operations and Editorial committees, and as treasurer of the Northeast Association of Electric Cooperatives (covering the upstate New York and the Northern New England area.)

With energy, economic, and environmental concerns all now front and center, I want to use the experience and perspective I've gained on the WEC Board for the continued benefit of our Co-op, its members, and our communities.

Richard Rubin

Residence: I have lived in Plainfield for 35 years. I am married to Jayne Israel and have three children: Sam, Nicko, and Amanda

Kitchen. Nicko lives in Plainfield and is the owner of East Hill Tree Farm. Amanda also lives in Plainfield with her husband, Dan. They have two girls, Mabel and Sadie, my grandchildren. I am 66 years old.

Education/Profession: I was born and raised in the Boston area, attended Harvard College and then the University of Pennsylvania Law School. After law school I practiced



law in Boston, representing low-income clients for a couple of years before moving to Vermont in 1972. I have been an attorney in central Vermont since 1972, and for many years our law firm – Rubin, Kidney, Myer & DeWolfe – has had offices in downtown Barre. Our firm is also the public defender for Washington County. My practice has involved representing people with all kinds of legal problems. Mainly, I am a trial lawyer.

Community Service/WEC: I have served as a WEC director for 12 years. I was first elected after being appointed to complete the term of a board member who had resigned. In the community, I was a member of the Twinfield School Board for five years, helped establish the original food co-op in Plainfield, and served on the board of Vermont Legal Aid. I have also been active in various legal organizations, and am now a member of the board of the Vermont Association for Justice. Many years ago I was involved with my brother, Mathew Rubin, in creating the Wrightsville hydroelectric facility and the Winooski 8 hydroelectric plant in East Montpelier.

Mary Just Skinner

Residence: I have lived in Middlesex since 1977. I have been a WEC member for 35 years, and before that I was a Vermont Electric Co-op member for seven years. I am married to Scott Skinner and we have two sons living in California, one an immigration lawyer and the other a middle school teacher. I can be

reached at 223-7123, and by e-mail at mskinner@sover.net.

Education/Profession:

I graduated from Barnard College and earned my law degree from Columbia University. I have been a practicing lawyer in Montpelier since 1972. I worked for Vermont Legal Aid for four years and then opened my own law practice in 1976. My practice primarily involves family law and real estate, but earlier in my career I was involved in a number of utility cases. I represented a group of low-income Vermonters in what was known as the "purchased power" case in 1974. In the late '70s, Attorney General Jerry Diamond hired me as a Special Assistant Attorney General to represent the state in opposing a 150-percent increase in the cost of a pay phone call. We were successful in defeating the proposal.

Community Service: I have been a member of the Middlesex Selectboard for the last 15 years. I also served seven terms in the Vermont State Senate, including a period as chair of the Senate Finance Committee which handles utility legislation. I have been on the advisory board of RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) for 20 years, and I am a member of the Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice Community Relations and Development Committee. 



You can use motion sensors on lamps to save money on your electric bill. Sensors turn lights on automatically when someone enters a room, and turn them off after the person leaves.

DPS Updates Vermont's Home Energy Code

Homeowners Note: Provisions Apply To Renovations

Vermont has some of the oldest housing stock in the nation, and as a state and as individuals that's costing us more every year. The Regulatory Assistance Project (RAP), a Montpelier-based energy-policy think tank and advisory organization, said in a recent paper, "In 2010, Vermonters paid over \$600 million to import fossil fuels for use in our homes, businesses, and other buildings. That is almost \$300 million more than we were paying in 2000."

Those expenses divert money from other uses that could stimulate Vermont's economy, and also cause us to send a significant portion of our wealth out of state. According to RAP, the money we spend for residential and commercial heating exceeds the revenues brought into Vermont by the entire agricultural sector.

There are also environmental costs in throwing our heating money at energy-inefficient houses. "Fossil fuel used in buildings . . . represents the second-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Vermont (after transportation)," reported RAP, which noted that buildings in Vermont generate 26 percent of the state's greenhouse gas emissions, while in the U.S. as a whole only 8 percent of greenhouse gas emissions come from buildings.

For Vermonters personally, the costs are also high. Last December, House Speaker Shap Smith, urging federal support for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Project (LIHEAP), said the average Vermont household spends nearly \$3,000 annually on heating fuel.

State officials have long been aware of the problem. In 1997 the Legislature created a law seeking to upgrade Vermont's housing stock by: 1) imposing energy-efficiency requirements on all new building construction begun after June 1, 1998, and 2) applying these standards also to expansions/additions of at least 500 square feet in existing homes.

By these means, Vermont would improve its housing stock incrementally, raising the profile of energy efficiency in the contracting and construction industry and in the consciousness of homeowners contemplating renovations.



The Vermont Residential Building Energy Standards (RBES, often called the Vermont "energy code") focused largely on issues related to heating and air conditioning; some of the components covered were insulation, mechanical systems for heating and cooling, domestic hot water, fireplaces, and electrical systems.

Unfortunately, though, says WEC Director of Products & Services Bill Powell, the energy code fell short in at least two respects. First, there was little to no enforcement in most parts of the state; there is a self-reporting

requirement for contractors, but it was easily, and widely, ignored.

"Outside of Burlington, and maybe five other towns or cities where there is local code enforcement, there is no legal follow-up to ensure that homes and additions are meeting the RBES requirements," says

Powell – although that could, and should, be changing with a new plan to achieve 90-percent compliance for projects required to meet the state's code.

However, Powell also believes the energy code is not stringent enough. "What is a code-compliant house?" he asks. "It's not a best-practices house. Homeowners who really want effective efficiency standards should move well beyond what's in the energy code."

Other codified standards exist and are available that far exceed the RBES. Efficiency Vermont's ENERGY STAR®

Home services is the best-known in our area, and Powell directs WEC members wanting to improve their home's comfort and efficiency to this program. Efficiency Vermont's website (www.encyvermont.com) is the best way to get started. It provides general information on the program, including rebates that are available after the work is completed, and has a "Find A Contractor" link catalogued by Zip code. Subsidized services can be provided for qualified homeowners in our area through Central Vermont Community Action Council.

"The energy code is structured into the law and homeowners need to be aware of it," says Powell. "But effective retrofitting to conserve energy requires more comprehensive efforts. The Home Performance with ENERGY STAR program sets higher standards, and includes blower-door testing to check for air infiltration. It provides real and substantive improvements."

Starting with what we have: The energy code and existing homes

Certainly, there are technologically advanced energy-efficiency approaches to new construction (see "A Fresh Look At What's Possible," page 6), but to reduce Vermont's energy consumption and carbon footprint, the most important place to concentrate is on the 240,000 existing, occupied housing units, rather than 1,000 or so new units constructed each year.

To its credit, the energy code revisions approved by the DPS in 2011 widen the net for the kinds of projects covered. WEC members contemplating improvements to their homes should take heed.

The biggest change is that the old requirement – that additions of 500 square feet or more must meet the energy code – has been replaced. Now, virtually all additions and renovations that expose roof, wall, or floor cavities (or create new cavities) must comply with the RBES – regardless of size. Every project commencing on or after October 1, 2011, must meet the requirements.

Yet the code requirements apply only to the new project – be it a remodeling, repair, or expansion – itself. "For example," says Kelly Launder, assistant director of the Planning and Energy Resources Division of the Vermont Department of Public Service (DPS), "if you add a room you have to provide the required insulation. But you don't have to upgrade the insulation in the entire house."

The 2011 standards include 11 major changes, many of which are safety requirements related to ventilation and combustion. There's also a new requirement mandating programmable thermostats, except for radiant floor heating systems and space heaters, and a requirement that at least half of permanently installed lighting fixtures use high-efficiency lamps.

The RBES exempts work performed by homeowners at their own residence, rather than a contractor. However, at the time of a prospective sale an owner must disclose in writing the nature and extent of any non-compliant work.

The residential energy standards apply to single-family homes and duplexes, multi-family buildings, and all other residential dwellings up to three stories high. The code also applies to factory-built modular homes not on a permanent chassis. Exempt buildings include high-rise residential buildings, mobile homes on a permanent chassis with detachable wheels, hunting camps, and historic buildings. The residential portions of mixed-use buildings must meet the energy code in place at the time of their construction or renovation.

Heads up: Energy a factor in private home sales

The 1997 Vermont statute requires the DPS to update energy codes "promptly" after the International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) is updated, which is every three years. The 2011 revisions, however, followed the 2009 revisions by just two years – and that was because of the "stimulus

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By the end of 2009 there were almost 286 million active wireless devices in the U.S. (cell phones and other communications tools), all of them with rechargers. Do your part for conservation by unplugging yours when the recharge is complete.

DPS Updates Vermont's Home Energy Code

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bill," the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The ARRA provided financing for a breadth of energy-related projects including compliance with state energy codes. Says Launder: "States had to either conform to the IECC of 2009 or surpass it if they wanted the funds. And they all did."

In its appeal for ARRA funds, Vermont committed to achieving 90-percent compliance with the energy code by 2017. If successful, this could address Bill Powell's complaint about lack of enforcement. A 2009 statewide assessment found that only 72 percent of newly constructed buildings in Vermont met the technical requirements of the code.

When a new-construction project or qualified home renovations are

completed, the contractor is supposed to post a compliance certificate on the breaker box door or on the heating equipment. The contractor must also file a copy of the certificate with the town clerk where the home is located, and mail a copy to the Planning and Energy Resources Division of the Department of Public Service.

This "self-certification" process has not always been followed. Yet as awareness of energy-related costs and

impacts increases, Launder finds that energy-code compliance is becoming an issue in home sales.

"I get calls from sellers who are going into a closing in a week or two and finding that the buyers' attorneys are looking into this," she says. "They're trying to find out if I have the certification on file. Depending on what the contractor did, sometimes I do and

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A Fresh Look At What's Possible In Home Construction

Passivhaus, ZEB, and GHG Reductions

Vermont's Residential Building Energy Standards (RBES, or "energy code"), upgraded in 2011 through a public process conducted by the state Department of Public Service, sets mandatory minimum standards for energy efficiency and conservation for new home construction begun on or after October 1, 2011. The standards apply to most new single-family homes, duplexes, and multi-family buildings up to three stories in height.

If the RBES is a "floor" for the residential building industry, we don't know yet what the "ceiling" could be. Construction methodologies and conservation technology continue to evolve. But we're getting a glimpse of the upper reaches through two fairly recent architectural concepts: the Passivhaus, pioneered in Germany in 1990, and net zero-energy buildings (ZEB). Both concepts have gained a toehold in Vermont, where interest is high in energy conservation and efficiency.

The Passivhaus, generally translated to "Passive House" in the U.S., is a building that, true to its name, seeks to take utmost advantage of ambient sources of heat generation, including waste heat from lighting and appliances and even the body heat of living beings (humans and animals). Combined with passive solar design and other factors, the goal is to create a house so efficient and air tight that conventional heating systems are unnecessary. In U.S. terms, Passivhaus achieves energy savings of between 75 percent and 95 percent for space heating.

The concept has been proven to work. According to the *New York Times* (cited in Wikipedia) some 25,000 Passivhaus structures had been built and certified, by the Passivhaus Institut in Darmstadt, Germany, in Europe by 2010. Certification requires meeting specific criteria regarding energy consumption, air exchanges, and other factors. There are additional costs to constructing these buildings, compared to more-conventional designs, and the same source says those cost increases become "significant" in Northern Europe above 60° latitude. But by way of illustration, Moscow is at 55° latitude, London at 51°, and Vermont sits at just



The term "Passivhaus" applies to an originally German construction design for buildings that use virtually no energy for space heating or cooling. This photo shows one of the first Passivhaus buildings, constructed in 1990. It is located in Darmstadt.

above 43° latitude.

Passivhaus has been slower to catch on in the U.S. – reportedly, there were 13 completed and certified structures in the U.S. in 2010 – but interest is picking up, and a small number of Passivhaus homes have been built in Vermont. These include an asymmetrical house in Brattleboro, and a Habitat for Humanity home in Chittenden County.

Essential elements are superinsulation; airtightness to the point that a heat-recovery mechanical ventilation system is required to expel stale, unhealthy air; assiduous attention to air-leak prevention around construction joints and ductwork; and triple-pane, low-emissivity windows with argon or krypton gas between the panes. Siting and landscaping are also important factors for capturing maximum solar benefit and reducing draft. Besides new construction, it is also possible to retrofit some houses to meet Passivhaus standards.

ZEB is a different, and less rigorously defined, concept. Generally, though, a net zero-energy building is one that, in a year's time, does not consume more

energy than it generates from its own renewable sources such as sun, wind, biomass, etc. At least by one definition, ZEB homes require grid-connection and net metering; they draw utility power when needed, but provide enough

electricity from their own generation sources back into the grid that their "net" usage of commercial energy, over time, is zero – or less if they have provided more home-generated power to the grid than they have consumed.

ZEB structures use efficiency technologies similar to those of Passivhaus – e.g., high

insulation values and airtightness that achieves an extremely low rate of air exchanges as measured by blower-door tests.

Net zero-energy buildings have been cropping up in Vermont at least since 2009, when a house built in Charlotte won an award as the best ZEB house in the Northeast. There are architectural firms in central Vermont that specialize in ZEB design, and Yestermorrow Design/Build School in Warren is offering two courses in 2012 – one in March and another in October – in ZEB for new construction and renovations.

Rare good news


Tired of the unending dire news about energy consumption in the U.S.? Here's something different. Architecture 2030 – an international environmental advocacy group concerned with the climate-change impact of energy usage in the housing and commercial building sector – says that the U.S. industry has bent the upward trajectory of energy consumption and CO2 emissions from new buildings.

The February 6, 2012, issue of the group's e-newsletter (*2030 E-News*) cites information published by the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). Architecture 2030 focuses on its own "2030 Challenge" – to reduce fossil-fuel consumption by new buildings steadily, to the point that by 2030 new residential and commercial buildings will be "carbon neutral," emitting zero greenhouse gases. It calculates progress toward the 2030 Challenge through an Annual Energy Outlook (AEO).

The February 6 newsletter provides a graph based on the EIA report that "clearly illustrates that estimates of residential and commercial building energy use to 2030 have been dropping dramatically since 2005 – by nearly 70% — due to considerable movement within the building sector to improve . . . design and efficiency."

The newsletter continues: "In 2005, the AEO forecast an increase in total U.S. building floor area of 51.9% from 2005 to 2030, with energy consumption and CO2 emissions increasing by 44.4% and 53.1% respectively."

However, the 2011 AEO now projects a significantly reduced floor-area increase of 38.6 percent by 2030. Floor area can be an important indicator of buildings' energy usage, so the reported decrease was said to have produced reductions in predicted 2030 energy consumption of 9.2 percent and CO2 emissions of 16.5 percent below 2005 levels.

For Americans, there are very practical implications for this report, if it is accurate. "In its most recent estimate," the e-newsletter says, "the AEO 2011 forecasts that American consumers will spend \$3.66 trillion less on energy between 2012 and 2030 than was originally projected in 2005." 

DPS Updates Vermont's Home Energy Code

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sometimes I don't."

When a certificate should have been filed but was not, some attorneys are advising clients not to close until one has been obtained.

Stepped-up enforcement of energy-code compliance may turn out to be just one means the state will use to improve the energy performance of Vermont's housing stock. A bill before the Legislature this year – H.497 – proposes to require the owners of residential and commercial buildings to complete an energy-disclosure form and present it to a potential buyer

of the property. The new statute would apply to "all new and existing residential buildings" with a small number of exceptions such as briefly used hunting camps.

Using a form to be developed by the DPS and available on line, the seller would provide such information as "the square footage of the building or unit [to be sold] and the energy consumed, in Btus [British thermal units] per square foot," and "an estimated annual energy cost." The bill states that this process would be

ENERGY STAR®


Home services is the best-known energy-standard program in our area.

Efficiency Vermont's website (www.encyvermont.com) is the best way to get started.

designed to "predict with reasonable accuracy the energy performance of the building or unit assuming an average occupancy."

H.497 was introduced during the 2011 session and studied further over the summer. Its fate in 2012 is not definite. But what is definite is the intent of a lawmakers and state agencies to ratchet up home energy performance by various means, and time of sale is likely to be a point at which people who are not in compliance could face difficulties. WEC advises Co-op members who

own new homes, or have constructed additions or renovations to their homes, to check to see which edition of the RBES energy code applies (if any); it would depend upon the year the construction or renovation was done. If some version of the code applied, you should obtain a certificate from the builder now rather than later.

If you're contemplating construction or renovation, a 65-page *Vermont Residential Building Energy Code Handbook* can be obtained at www.publicservice.vermont.gov. You can also get the handbook by calling 855-887-0673. Then, when the work is done, make sure your contractor provides proof of its compliance, as required by law. 

2011 Community Fund Report

Irene Relief And Other Notable Causes

After Tropical Storm Irene struck on August 28 last year, causing Vermont's worst flooding since 1927, it seemed almost everyone wanted to help out. Volunteers showed up at the homes of people they didn't even know, in communities they didn't live in, to help clean up and repair their houses and property. Armies of citizens collected debris from streets, yards, fields, and rivers – branches and tree trunks; furniture, appliances, parts of houses, and propane tanks torn from their footings – piling it in huge mounds until trucks and hazmat handlers could haul it away. They shared their homes with the displaced, and gave generously to special funds and food shelves. It was commitment in action, reaffirming the vision of Vermont as a place where people care about their fellow citizens and the next community down the road.

Vermont businesses also stepped up, forgetting their bottom line for the moment and making generous donations to help revive the state. The board of directors and staff at Washington Electric Cooperative also wanted to help out. By sheer luck, most of WEC's service territory had escaped serious damage, but this wasn't a time for parochial considerations like "service territories" when the statewide need was so great.

But Washington Electric could have faced a different limitation: as a cooperative it can't give away its members' money, no matter how good the cause. However, WEC had an ace in the hole – the Washington Electric Community Fund, which is financed by voluntary contributions from Co-op members who choose to donate their annual capital credit refunds explicitly to capitalize a fund that does good in the community.

WEC therefore stepped up quickly and gave \$3,000 to a trio of statewide funds working to provide relief in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene. The Co-op gave \$1,500 to the Vermont Disaster Relief Fund for its efforts with

Washington Electric Cooperative's Community Fund is capitalized by members and former members voluntarily donating their annual capital credit refunds, rather than taking those amounts as deductions from their November electric bills – or, in the case of former members, waiving the checks that would come to them as refunds. It's a way we can all make small contributions that add up to support worthy causes in central Vermont. You can make the choice on an annual basis or sign up to have your capital credit refunds diverted automatically to the Community Fund. Contact the Co-op to learn how.

United Way to assist individuals and families whose lives were disrupted by the storm. WEC also gave \$750 to the Vermont Irene Flood Relief Fund, administered by the Central Vermont Community Action Council to provide assistance to small businesses harmed by the storm; and another \$750 to the Vermont Farm Disaster Relief Fund, being run in partnership by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets and the Vermont Community Foundation.

General Manager Avram Patt acknowledged that this wasn't the way it's usually done with the WEC Community Fund.

"Normally, groups who are doing fundraising or believe they would qualify for a donation send us a request in writing, or call me up and say 'Can we apply for money from the Community Fund?' I'll tell them, 'Send me an e-mail explaining what you would like to use it for.' It doesn't have to be a big fundraising package."

What was different about the post-Irene donations was that no one asked the Co-op to contribute.

"Unsolicited donations are not the norm," said Patt. The manager fields requests from organizations, and a committee of the Board of Directors (consisting of Richard Rubin, Marion Milne, and Barry Bernstein) oversees his decisions.

"It came up in our discussions after the flood that we wanted to do something," said Patt. "I said I would do some quick research. From that, we identified three groups we were confident in and which were addressing needs we felt were important: individual people who were suffering, businesses, and farms."

The donations were also unusual for the Community Fund in that they were not targeted to local causes.

"We really wanted to be part of the statewide movement after Irene," Patt said. "This was the biggest problem facing Vermont in decades. It didn't make sense to try to find someone doing something local about the flooding and destruction. We were glad we had the Community Fund to draw on at a time like that."

2011 profile

Every year, soon after the calendar flips in January, Patt prepares a report for the board of directors on the activities the previous year of the WEC Community Fund. His January 17, 2012, report covered the fund's donations in 2011.

In total last year, the Community Fund gave \$23,373.93 to organizations and activities – a slight drop from the \$24,277.89 that was donated in 2010. The 2011 donations went to 49 different applicants and projects, while the year before there were 44 donations. That seems to speak to a level of consistency the fund has achieved since it was founded in 2003.

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2011 WEC Community Fund Contributions

Contribution Recipients

Adopt-A-Family (VT National Guard)
Barre Heritage Festival
Barre Youth Sports Association
Bradford Public Library
Cabot Coalition
Central VT Adult Basic Education
Central VT Community Action
Central VT Community Land Trust
Chelsea Public Library
Cutler Memorial Library
CV Council on Aging
CV Home Health and Hospice
East Montpelier Front Porch Forum
East Montpelier Rally Day Fund
Farm First Program
Food Works – Growing Local Fest
Friends of the Mad River
Girls Scouts Troop 30890
Green Mountain Film Festival
Groton Community Club
Homeshare NOW
Jaquith Public Library
Jaquith Public Library
(2011 Summer Concert Series)
Kellogg-Hubbard Library
Kingdom County Productions
LACE

Mad River Valley Rotary fundraiser for local non-profits
Montpelier Alive – First Night
Newspapers in Education
North Branch Nature Center
Northfield American Legion
(Toys for our Kids)
People's Health & Wellness Clinic
Plainfield Historical Society
Studio Place Arts
Stuff-a-Truck (foodshelf purchases)
Sugar Maple Preschool
Topsham Historical Society
Twin Valley Seniors
Twinfield Union School
Upper Valley Services
Vermont Irene Fund
(aid for small businesses)
VT Center for Independent Living
VT Community Foundation
(Farm Disaster Relief Fund)
VT Disaster Relief Fund
VT Horse Assisted Therapy
VT River Conservancy
VT State Science & Mathematics Fair
VT Youth Conservation Corps
Washington County 4-H Foundation
Washington County Youth Service Bureau

Yearlong Celebration of Cooperatives

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venue to contrast how we differ from profit-driven companies.”

WEC's Avram Patt found that celebration of the cooperative model to be on display at the NRECA's Annual Meeting, held March 5 to March 7 in San Diego, California. The keynote speaker was Dame Pauline Green, president of the International Cooperative Alliance.

(The title, “dame,” is a giveaway that Dame Green is British, which seems appropriate because the business that launched the modern cooperative movement was a store founded by weavers in Rochdale, England, in 1844. The Rochdale cooperative drafted what are now called The Seven Cooperative Principles, which serve as a guide and, when needed, a reminder for modern cooperatives. But almost a century before Rochdale, in 1752, Benjamin Franklin formed the first known co-op in the New World: The Philadelphia Contributionship for the Insurance of Houses from Loss by Fire. Like lightning, which Franklin also “invented,” it is still in operation.)

Referring to Dame Green, Patt said, “I thought she spoke very passionately about co-ops, and what she said about co-ops in developing countries was particularly interesting.” In a breakout session during the conference, Patt said, “She was talking about co-ops needing to remain true to the particular principle that says they are independent.” (*Principle #4: “Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments . . . they do so on terms that . . . maintain their cooperative autonomy.”*) “She said there are some countries that have tried to start co-ops and control them.”

It was a well-placed reminder, because the NRECA has an active International Program that helps developing countries build electricity infrastructures and often encourages them to use the cooperative framework. In doing so they are drawing on the U.S. experience, which was that co-ops were the means for extending electric power into rural areas because investor-owned utilities deemed it unprofitable. According to Ingrid Hunsicker, the NRECA's manager of international program development, “More than two billion people worldwide still lack electricity, and millions more must depend on unreliable and unsafe power.”

Countries where electric cooperatives are going strong include Argentina, with 425 electric co-ops, the Philippines (119 electric co-ops), Bangladesh (72), and Costa Rica, South Sudan, and Uganda. Bolivia has the largest electric co-op in the world, Cooperativa Rural de Electrificación, with 400,000 members.

Patt said he was impressed by the number of NRECA members from all over the country whose contributions in group discussions revealed a strong

commitment to the co-op way of doing business.

How co-ops break ground

Co-op Currents usually dedicates space in our October issue to feature other cooperative enterprises in central Vermont or Vermont as a whole, because October is National Cooperative Month. Nevertheless, here are some co-op factoids:

- There are more than 29,200 co-ops in the United States.
- Close to 1 billion people around the world are members of cooperatives.
- Internationally, co-ops employ 100 million people.
- More than 300,000 Vermonters are member-owners of co-ops, and nearly 50 percent of Vermonters belong to at

2011 Community Fund

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“We have established a history of annual support to certain organizations,” said Patt, “and I believe it's a good practice to have an ongoing relationship with some recipients because we know they're doing good work. Other requests are occasional rather than annual, and there are new requests each year. In 2011 we made six donations to new recipients, and at least one of those was presented to us as a one-time request. That was a donation toward the fee for the town of East Montpelier establishing a site with the Front Porch Forum.” (*Co-op Currents* will profile two Community Fund recipients – East Montpelier's Front Porch Forum and Upper Valley Services – and how they used WEC's donations, in upcoming issues.)

In his yearly reports Patt separates the recipients into four categories: environmental organizations or projects, social services, arts and performances, and community organizations (with “others” lumped into the final group). In 2011, the Irene-relief donations

least one cooperative.


- Among the co-ops in Vermont are agricultural co-ops, consumer-food co-ops, credit unions, child-care co-ops, insurance co-ops, housing co-ops, farm-credit co-ops, workers co-ops (cooperative owners of their places of employment), cooperatively owned ski areas, and of course electric co-ops.

Because their intrinsic priority is to advance and protect the interests of their members, rather than stockholders, co-ops have notched some important victories and “firsts.” Here are two cited by *RE Magazine*:

“Credit unions fought off the destructive practice of payday loans by creating salary advance loans with low rates that place part of the borrowing into a savings account – helping their

members escape a cycle of debt.” And, “Marketing cooperatives added food nutrition labels to products long before it was required by federal law.”

Co-ops can be on the cutting edge because they're motivated by improvements, not by profits. Referring again to Dame Pauline Green at the recent NRECA Annual Meeting, Patt said, “She made a point of saying she hoped U.S. electric co-ops would do a lot of renewable-energy development. I'm glad to say that at Washington Electric we're doing our part in that regard.”

Co-ops will be a subject of discussion in these pages in 2012. If you have co-op stories of your own that you would like to contribute, please be in touch. 

constituted a fifth group. Among them all, social services received the largest portion of donations (43 percent), with \$10,793.93 going to 19 recipients.

There are rules that govern the Community Fund. Causes that receive donations are ones the committee believes most people would endorse. The fund does not contribute to religious or political groups, and organizations must be financially viable so that WEC's members' money is not wasted. Applicants must be able to demonstrate broad support in their communities.


The need, with no ‘carry forward’

The Community Fund faces a new situation as its 2012 activities get underway. Historically, there were always unused monies in the fund at the end of each year, and they were brought forward and added to the donations people had recently contributed in November by foregoing their capital credit refunds. But in 2011 there was no untapped money to carry forward.

WEC members did contribute

approximately \$19,000 by choosing not to take their capital credit refunds, and small amounts trickle in during the course of a year. But right now it looks like WEC will have only around \$19,000 to work with in 2012, a drop of about \$4,000 from 2011 and \$5,000 from 2010.

That means if you haven't dedicated your capital credit refund to the Community Fund before, it would be good to consider doing so. You can call the Co-op to find out how. The refunds are relatively small, generally in the \$5-\$40 range, and are customarily used to reduce a member's November electric bill. Since it's rare that people actually receive them in hand, giving them up is less noticeable. Yet those small amounts build up, to the point that WEC's Community Fund can make meaningful contributions to causes in our state and neighborhoods.

Please consider chipping in, and remember that you can also make a contribution aside from your capital credit refund if you wish. A list of the organizations receiving Community Fund contributions in 2011 can be seen on page 7. 

WEC'S 73rd Annual Meeting Dinner Reservation

Deadline for reservations is Friday, May 11, 2012

Vegetarian Lasagna, Eggplant Parmesan, or Vermont Ham & Turkey Featuring Vermont Products

Please list all attendees (for name tag purposes) and be sure to indicate each attendee's dinner choice.

	Adult	Child	Vegetarian <u>Lasagna</u>	Eggplant <u>Parmesan</u>	Ham & <u>Turkey</u>
Name _____ Please Print	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Name _____ Please Print	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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Name _____ Please Print	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mailing address: _____ Telephone #: _____					
Account #: _____			OR	Map #: _____	
\$8 per adult/\$4 per child (under 12)			Amount enclosed: \$ _____		
Please make checks payable to WEC and return to PO Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651 by May 11.					