Things didn't go according to plan last year in a remote section of Washington Electric's service territory, in the rugged hills of Tunbridge, up east of the village. The Co-op was this close (hold your fingers an inch or two apart) to finishing a line-reconstruction project that replaced and upgraded some of the oldest power poles and conductor (wire) on the Co-op's system when the snowstorm of December 9 struck Vermont. It caused some of the most widespread and extensive utility damage in the state's history. For the Co-op, this three-day, two-storm event was the biggest blow ever, causing outages — some long, some short — to more than half of WEC's membership.

Tunbridge was hit hard. Outages for many people lasted for days because the power lines in lots of places ran through deep woods; it seemed that as soon as a WEC crew repaired an area, other trees, laden with ice and snow, broke and took down lines that caused outages to people who had just had their power restored. The restoration process lasted about nine days — nine rugged days for WEC's entire staff: the linemen and operations assistants in the field; the tree-clearing contractors, and dispatchers working around the clock at the office; member service representatives helping callers get through the ordeal, and the rest of the office and warehouse employees who contributed in myriad ways. Of course they were also nine wearying days for many Washington Electric Co-op members who had to live with intermittent power, or for long periods with no power at all.

But another victim of the storm was that newly complete, 40-pole line-reconstruction project in Tunbridge, which serves a comparatively small number of farms, residences, and camps in the area between Hoyt Hill Road and Potash Hill Road. (Roads in this part of Tunbridge include “Hill” in their names for good reason.)

“We were getting close,” says WEC Operations Director Dan Weston. “We had probably set 30-some poles, so we didn’t have a lot more to do, and then it was going to be a good winter project, running the wire in.”

It had been very hard work — what Weston calls “raw lineman work.” When WEC and other rural electric co-ops were founded in the late 1930s and the 1940s, one way they controlled costs was by building their infrastructures — the poles and wires — directly across farm fields, a shorter distance than it would have been to build along roadides.

WEC Picks Up Where It Left Off Tunbridge Rebuild Had Been Sidelined by December Storm

Three “members” of Ted Hoyt’s dairy herd enjoying a nice cow day in Tunbridge. The line-reconstruction project (see the poles behind them) got its start at Ted’s farm last year. After it was halted by the December 2014 storm Construction Foreman Kevin Lanphear and his crew finished it up in August.

A Primer On Your WEC Advantage

So what are these things called capital credits?

At an electric cooperative, you are more than just a customer. You are a member. In fact, you are part-owner of your local co-op. As part of that relationship, you will periodically receive money back in the form of capital credit refunds. Because WEC is a cooperative, owned by its members, and operates as a not-for-profit, any revenues over and above the cost of doing business are considered “margins.” These margins are used by the Cooperative as operating capital. This capital allows WEC to finance operations, power restoration after outages, and construction, with the intent that this money will be repaid in later years when the Cooperative is financially able to do so. The return of money to members is what the capital credit process is all about.

The capital credit process is a two-step procedure. First, we “allocate” margins to member accounts. That doesn’t mean you get that money in the year allocated. Think of this as a credit to an account we set up for you called capital credits, and it is a “promise” to pay you in the future or some point down the road.

The next step is what most members are most interested in, and this is the “retirement” of dollars — actually sending out dollars to members (in the form of credits on bills, or checks). In the second step, we decide how much money we can give back to our members from the members’ capital credit accounts. This return of dollars is taking a portion of your capital credit account and providing that money to

continued on page 6

continued on page 8
By Barry Bernstein

As always, when we get to this time of year it seems that summer is too fleeting, although I am thankful for the warm weather (maybe a little too hot) in August and in early September. We have experienced some scattered outages, and on my property a large ash tree came down after a lightning strike, taking the line out and with it the electric service. But crews were there quickly and got the lights back on before I had time to call or even ask from my neighbors asking if I knew what had happened. As the seasons change we all begin our preparations for colder temperatures – stacking wood, freezing and canning vegetables, sending the kids back to school, and so much more – while at your Co-op we continue to work on the fair weather jobs: regular maintenance, pole inspection and treatment, right-of-way trimming, new hookups, and Construction Work Plan projects. One of those projects, a very rural line reconstruction in Tunbridge, is featured in this edition of Co-op Currents.

Generation
Production at our Coventry generating plant continues to be strong, while the Wrightsville hydropower plant is at its low-production part of the season.

As the new state law, Act 148, takes effect, excluding many kinds of organic materials from landfills, it has begun to affect the content of the waste taken in by the Coventry landfill. Organics are the materials that break down through biological processes, which produces the methane gas that our Co-op uses to generate renewable electric power at our plant alongside the landfill. But as we reported in our July issue, the reduction in food waste going to the landfill because of Act 148 is compensated for by sewage treatment plant sludge, including sludge from Montpelier and Barre here in central Vermont. This organic sludge goes through the same biological processes, and also speeds up the breakdown of other materials in the landfill, so our source of methane will remain plentiful.

Another issue we’re encountering that has to do with changes in the landfill’s content is the increase over the years of a chemical compound called siloxane. It comes from hygiene and cosmetics products – shampoo, soap, makeup, etc. – as well as plastics, salad dressings, mayonnaise and other sources. Siloxane enters the landfill in the assorted waste that is transported there, and also in the sewage treatment plant sludge. It enters our generating plant in gaseous form with the methane, but when heated by combustion in our engines the siloxane becomes silica – basically, sand. Sand, of course, is an abrasive and wears down the valves, cylinders and other parts of our Caterpillar engines.

WEC is at the beginning stage of exploring options for replacing the 10-year-old gas scrubber equipment we have used at the generation plant, and in doing so we are looking at new technology to help us address the siloxane issue. We will provide more information on the subject of a new scrubber system in upcoming editions of Currents.

Co-op Currents

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Reaching 90 percent renewables by 2050
Your Co-op continues to support the state’s goal of obtaining 90 percent of our energy – in all energy sectors – from renewable sources by 2050. I have discussed global warming and climate change regularly in my President’s Message, and the continual impact it has on our Co-op, our membership, and the state. WEC took an early leadership role in working with members to assist and support them becoming more energy efficient and conserving energy. We also took leadership in converting our power supply to 100-percent renewables and embracing net metering. Following the passage of Act 56 and Act 99, we are embracing the opportunities we have in place to work with our members to help them reduce their fossil fuel usage. Our staff members are exploring potential program options, and we will be writing more about these new programs as they develop.

We strongly believe that one of the first steps for members who have not already done so is to get an energy audit of their homes or businesses so they can best weigh their options for managing their energy needs despite perhaps limited access to funds. Tightening your building’s envelope, replacing inefficient appliances, and (when appropriate and affordable) converting from fossil fuel to a renewable fuel source for heat or even transportation, are all potential avenues that our members could pursue.

When considering solar panels, electric vehicles, and air source heat pumps, the sticker price is not small. Looking at all your options, including weatherization, is important so that you can invest your dollars wisely. Your best option may be to super-insulate your home and then downsize your systems because they’ll no longer need to be as productive (and use as much energy).

But the place to start is the energy audit. It will provide the information you need to devise an energy-saving plan appropriate to your situation and your financial resources.

The big questions
As we engage the critical questions regarding Vermont’s 90-percent-renewables goal – “How do we get there?” and “How do we honestly weigh the tradeoffs?” – it’s important that we do so respectfully and transparently. Obviously, there are very strongly held views, as evidenced in the debates on wind, expansion of the gas pipeline, and more recently on commercial solar expansion. What is most critical, from my perspective, is how we weigh our choices and reach our conclusions on...
Helping People Help Themselves
For Fifty Years
Once a New Idea in Adult Education, CVABE Hits a Milestone

Reading, we tend to think, is something that should be learned in grade school. Children are taught to read, just as they’re taught to line up in the hallway, use the playground safely at recess, and raise their hands in class when they have a question or an answer. Adults, in a developed society, are presumed to look at words on a page or a sign or a screen, and know what they mean.

Yet in Vermont, says Carol Shults-Perkins, the executive director of Central Vermont Adult Basic Education (CVABE), one in eight adults lacks basic literacy skills for reading and writing.

“And that’s 62,000 people in our state,” she says.

There can be any number of reasons: rural children forced by the death or injury of a parent to leave school early to help on the farm; an unsettled life because of an unstable family situation, resulting in one move after another and constant changing of schools. Furthermore, educators haven’t always understood as much as they do now about learning disabilities, and that a child who can’t be reached through ordinary instruction can be taught successfully through alternative means. Consequently, many learning-challenged children of an earlier era are the adults whom Carol and her CVABE staff and volunteers refer to as having “fragile literacy skills.”

To call this an impediment is an understatement. “There’s lots of significant data,” Carol says, “linking literacy to unemployment, poverty, criminal activity, and higher healthcare costs.” All of these are negative consequences not just for the reading-impaired adult, but for society as a whole. “And the children of adults who are illiterate,” she adds, “are twice as likely to have literacy challenges themselves.”

If you’re a Washington Electric Co-op member and you have elected to support WEC’s Community Fund by donating your annual capital credit refunds (see page 4), WEC members who them to the Community Fund instead members no longer purchasing power credits as electric bill deductions (for current members) or checks (for former credits). The Co-op’s Board of Directors. The process culminates over the next several weeks with the distribution of those credits as electric bill deductions (for current members) or checks (for former members no longer purchasing power from the Co-op).

So it’s a good time to again encourage people to forego (usually) modest payments and donate them to the Community Fund instead—a fund where every donated dollar helps provide grants to worthwhile nonprofit organizations throughout WEC’s 41 towns and across Vermont, with literally none of the money diverted to overhead or administrative costs. Added to the contributions from thousands of other WEC members, they pack more punch, because they help support programs like Central Vermont Adult Basic Education.

‘Night school’ no more
CVABE is celebrating a milestone this 2015-2016 school year. It began as a new idea, branching off from the traditional “night school” that used to be the typical approach to remedial adult education, in 1965. This year CVABE is 50 years old.

“We’ll be celebrating that anniversary in June,” says Carol. Shults-Perkins, “and publicizing it throughout the year.”

Adult basic education, on the CVABE model, was an evolutionary improvement on the night school system. Night school was primarily geared toward helping adults earn a Graduate Equivalency Degree, or GED. CVABE provides that service if that’s the student’s goal, but it’s also structured to assist adults who want to fill a gap in their lives by finally earning their high school diploma.

“I don’t think there are many jobs you can get at all anymore without high school credentials or a GED,” says Carol. “That’s probably more important is the flexibility built into the program. Night school was a school-based model with group classes held in the evening. CVABE departed from that regime.

“Having individualized instruction and home-based services became recognized as a need,” Carol explains. “And it was about much more than literacy. Teachers at the night schools recognized that many in their classes couldn’t do basic math. A two-hour night school class was not hitting that mark.”

Over the next few years this alternative approach evolved and acquired more resources. In the five decades now under CVABE’s belt, its professional staff has grown to 20, which includes 12 teachers providing direct services to students. Those services remain very personalized, helping the students determine their academic and career goals, and then helping them accomplish those goals. Most are still free, though tests for the GED and a few other services entail the standard fee.

“I was one of the first two home-based teachers hired in this area,” says Carol, who joined the CVABE staff in 1972 and has served as executive director since 2012.

Educational and human-services agencies helped link the new organization with people who would benefit from its services. One of the first connections made was with Head Start. That program’s outreach workers had found that many low-income households with pre-school-aged children, says Carol, “and they would often recognize that the parents couldn’t read to their children because they couldn’t read themselves.”

CVABE’s growing corps of mobile instructors – folks like herself, Carol recalls, driving from home to home with educational materials in the back seats of their cars – were provided with the names of Head Start parents, and started knocking on doors, talking about the program, stressing that most services were free, and that one-on-one instruction could accommodate the schedule of each adult student. She looks back fondly on those days of working with people eager to take advantage of this convenient and individualized model of adult schooling.

“The program grew by word of mouth,” she says. “I might be teaching in someone’s kitchen and a neighbor would drop by. The student might say, ‘This is my teacher; I’m working on math for my GED,’ and that individual would ask me about the program.”

As CVABE became more established it developed “learning centers” – teaching and administrative facilities in Barre, Montpelier, Waterbury, Bradford, Randolph, and Morrisville (addresses and contact information can be found at www.cvabe.org) to complement the home-schooling option. The centers sometimes attract people who don’t want to reveal their literacy and math deficiencies to family members.

“We’ve had a number of individuals who, once they entered our doors and

continued on page 8
Washington Electric Cooperative is preparing to issue capital credit refunds to current and former members, as authorized by WEC's Board of Directors. 

Under the 2015 Equity Distribution Plan, capital credits will be returned to eligible people who purchased electric utility service during years 1993 and 2014. While safeguarding the Co-op's financial stability, the Board of Directors has targeted a total amount of approximately $500,000 for distribution in 2015, which is $50,000 greater than the amount allocated for this purpose in 2014. Of the remaining $50,000 included in the 2015 plan, $40,000 will address distributions for the most recent (or “last”) member-owners. The amount remaining after that distribution will be divided between FIFO and LIFO distribution plans.

1.

This year $300,000 of the money earmarked under the 2015 Equity Distribution Plan will go to Co-op members from 1993. The Co-op began addressing the 1993 earned in 1993. LIFO distribution plans pay the most recent allocations, a way of capital credit accounts. Since WEC initiated capital credit distributions in 1998 it has most recent (or “last”) members. FIFO distribution plans reach back to pay off historical those surplus revenues – called margins – among the member-owners. The amount Directors has targeted a total amount of approximately $350,000 for distribution in Barrows, Michael 

Barral, Robert 

Barker, Winston 

Barfield, Coy 

Barcomb, Don A 

Bankes, Tina M 

Ball, Nancy A 

Ball, Diane 

Baker, Kevin 

Austin, Deborah 

Avery, Terry 

Ayler, Patrick 

Bacalda, Cyndy 

Baird, Kenneth 

Ball, Nancy A 

Barfield, Coy 

Barcomb, Don A 

Barrows, Michael
Now, some 75 years later, a lot of those fields have grown up into woods, making it harder to reach the lines for repair and maintenance.

In some places, WEC has relocated sections of infrastructure to the roadides. In this part of Tunbridge, though, Weston explains, that wasn’t an option. The roads are small and the woodsy terrain alongside them is often steep – not hospitable to a power line corridor. Plus, these twisting, winding roads don’t travel from Point A to Point B in anything resembling a direct route. It didn’t take long for WEC’s engineering department to conclude that rebuilding this power line section “in place” was the best option.

It’s certainly not all woods. The first 10 poles or so go across Ted Hoyt’s fields, high up on Hoyt Hill Road, which is open territory with wonderful views. But at Ted’s place and everywhere else on this power line route “field” doesn’t mean “flat,” by a long shot, and the work was done with long stretches not accessible by road, and interrupted by creek beds and other impediments.

WEC’s digger truck (carrying an augur for drilling holes for the power poles) could reach some of these locations; elsewhere the Co-op’s track vehicle was needed, and even then it was rough going.

No question that it needed to be done. “This project,” Weston explains, “was identified in our current four-year Construction Work Plan [CWP] because there were a lot of old and deteriorated poles, and very small, outdated conductors in poor condition because of splices made over the years for repairs. This is cross-country, low-density territory in terms of the numbers of people served. But our Construction Work Plan helps us target and improve our reliability even at the farthest ends of our lines, because those Co-op members pay the same electric bill everyone else does.”

So in the summer and fall of 2014 WEC undertook that project, pole by pole, with a team headed up by the Co-op’s off-road construction foreman, First Class Lineman Kevin Lanphear. And it looked like the end was in sight, until the big storm of December 9 put a stop to it.

“Given the impact of the storm and the clean-up afterward, it took us through March to get the system back to where it was before the storm,” says Weston, referring to WEC’s overall 1,250-mile electric distribution infrastructure. “April comes along and we have mud season. Try working in those hills in mud season! So in the summer and fall of 2014 WEC undertook that project, pole by pole, with a team headed up by the Co-op’s off-road construction foreman, First Class Lineman Kevin Lanphear. And it looked like the end was in sight, until the big storm of December 9 put a stop to it.

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Then all of a sudden it’s May, and people are lined up for new connections, just like every summer. But then in July, we said ‘Okay, we’re going to get back to that line in Tunbridge and finish it up.’”

“Then all of a sudden it’s May, and people are lined up for new connections, just like every summer. But then in July, we said ‘Okay, we’re going to get back to that line in Tunbridge and finish it up.’”

And that’s what we did. The old system stayed in place over the winter and got us through without too many problems for the people there, but they were due for a new power system to serve them.”

Kevin Lanphear’s crew returned and set the remaining poles for this roughly two-mile section. Then they ran the new conductor in, thicker and sturdier than the wire used in the 1940s.

Because that wire is also heavier, it requires that there be shorter spans between poles to provide adequate support. So there were more of them, and the new poles are stouter than the original ones (several of which had been condemned, marked with a red tag for replacement by WEC’s contracted pole-inspection workers). And they are taller; most are 40-foot poles, five feet or so greater in height than what was there previously.

Replacing those two miles of live wire required a series of planned outages, which affected the members in the area. They received advance notice from the Co-op, and came to expect a temporary outage most

Some of the right-of-way for this line-rebuilding project ran through the woods (left), and some was on open farming land (below), but very little was conveniently by the road. This is what “rural electrification,” now often taken for granted, is all about.

Washington Electric Co-op member Ted Hoyt, of Tunbridge, was helpful and cooperative, say the Co-op’s linemen, when they needed access to his land to set nearly a dozen new poles. Ted has three sons who, he says, will be the eighth generation of the family to farm the land on Hoyt Hill Road.

The Tunbridge line-reconstruction was what WEC’s Dan Weston calls “raw linemen work.” After starting at the Hoyt farm it went cross-country for almost two miles before emerging at the corner of Kibling Hill and Potash Hill roads.
Tuesday mornings in August, as well as a couple of Thursdays, from 9:30 a.m. to noon, Weston says he received very few complaints. “My appreciation goes out to all the members on this section of line for their patience and understanding,” he says. “And the landowners were great, giving us access to their property without any problems. We did some repair work when needed, to fill in ruts caused by our equipment. Honestly, half the success for getting this job done so efficiently in August goes to our members, who really cooperated.”

The rest of the credit, Weston says, goes to Kevin’s construction team (which included Lineworker First Class Jason Smith and Apprentice Lineman Scott Matheson), who accomplished this rigorous work in a short time period, and to Operations & Construction Services Manager Brent Lilley, who oversees and coordinates the Co-op’s work projects. It’s Brent who gives the crews guidance, sees that they are well-equipped for the work ahead of them, and shuffles the various demands on the Operations department to make sure a project like the Tunbridge reconstruction gets done. There are now new poles and wires strung across this mountainous and quintessentially “Vermont” section of WEC’s territory. Some of the old poles have been cut off the roadway and remain there, waiting for the phone company to transfer their wires to the new power poles. Pretty soon the Co-op will continue the reconstruction beyond where it terminates by a cornfield on Potash Hill Road. “We have another half to three-quarters of a mile that we’re going to do,” says Weston.

Of course, for the Co-op, this work never ends. Sections of the infrastructure are always getting older and more weathered with the equipment becoming outdated for advanced technology. For the staff, though, there’s a great sense of accomplishment in taking on a challenging project like this, which will make a difference for members at the far reaches of the service area, and getting it done, once and for all, before the next storm can hit.
Capital Credits continued from page 1

you. We balance the amount paid out with the financial needs of the Co-op. Capital credits are a significant source of equity and help to fund the growth and maintenance of the electric system. Therefore, the amount of dollars retired each year is determined based on the Co-op’s financial needs. Let’s take a look at some of the more common questions related to capital credits, to give you a better understanding of what your money means as a member of the Cooperative are a part of.

What are capital credits?
Capital credits represent the member’s share of ownership, otherwise known as equity, in the Cooperative. Your membership with WEC activates a capital credit account in your name. The amount of capital credits a member earns in a given year is based upon the amount of revenue the Cooperative receives from each member. This revenue comes to WEC primarily through the members’ payments for electricity.

What is the difference between allocated and retired capital credits?
Allocated capital credits appear as an entry on the permanent financial records of the Co-op and reflect your equity, or ownership, in WEC. When capital credits are retired, a check or a credit to your bill is issued, and your equity in the Co-op is reduced. Hence, it is a two-step process: first we allocate and then we retire capital credits.

How are margins allocated?
We allocate margins into a capital credit account based on your share of the revenue that was generated during that year. (Allocations to members vary, because the amount of electricity they purchase also varies widely.) We calculate your percentage of the total margins and allocate that amount to your account. Capital credits are allocated only during years in which WEC earns a margin. Remember, the allocation process is a “promise” to pay you in the future and does not mean you that money back in that year; depending on the schedule the Board establishes, distribution of funds or credits in the capital credit account may not be paid out for many years.

Will I receive a capital credit refund each year?
Not necessarily. Each year WEC’s Board of Directors makes a decision on whether to retire some capital credits based on the financial health of the Cooperative. When considering a retirement, the board analyzes and projects the financial needs of the Co-op and will authorize a retirement if WEC can afford it. During years the Co-op may experience high construction and power costs, or unanticipated expenses such as severe storms, which may result in the need to spend additional funds to repair lines. These and other events might increase the amount of money or equity is needed to fund large projects. Therefore, the board determines if WEC can afford to retire capital credits.

What do cooperatives do with capital credits when they are not retired?
Electric utilities are capital-intensive businesses requiring large investments in equipment. Like all businesses, WEC must maintain a balance between debt and equity to ensure financial stability. During periods of fast growth a large amount of money or equity is needed to build the wires and poles, upgrade the system to keep up with technology, and buy power necessary to serve members.

If you would like to donate your capital credits to the WEC Community Fund, please call us at 223-5245 or send a note to WEC, P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, Vermont 05651.

In order to fund this growth WEC has to borrow money from banks, reinvest member capital, or in some cases do both. By reinvesting your dollars into WEC, we are able to keep rates competitive by reducing the funds that must be borrowed from other sources.

Summary
We hope this has given you an understandable overview of capital credits. Let’s review the main points in closing.

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3. When the Co-op’s financial condition permits, your Board of Directors decides on an amount of money that will be expended to retire or pay a portion of the capital credits.
4. Your Co-op notifies you of how and when you’ll receive your capital credit refund.

That’s the Cooperative Difference! And if you are interested in helping others, you can easily donate your capital credits to the WEC Community Fund, refer to the notice in the top center column. See the article on page 3 on one such organization that has received help from the Community Fund, Central Vermont Adult Basic Education.

CVABE continued from page 7

Richard is learning to read and write with help from Susan.

developed a trusting relationship with a teacher or volunteer, have told us, “I’ve been walking by your learning center for years and couldn’t get the courage to walk in and say, can you help me learn to read?” says Carol.

CVABE has provided its merit to central Vermont’s communities and employers as well. When new regulations expanded the requirement that truck drivers obtain a CDL (commercial driver’s license) many towns faced a quandary; they had a workforce of skilled and experienced workers who knew how to operate their trucks and plows and dump-bodies but were not able to decipher the daunting CDL manual concerning road rules, or succeed at a multiple-choice test. (Check it out online; it’s not easy.)

The towns contacted CVABE, and teachers met with the drivers after their shifts at the town offices, or at their homes or the nearest learning center. Crisis averted.

A great way to volunteer
CVABE depends on a strong volunteer force. Volunteers supplement the teaching staff, provide the practical, office functions, and staff tables and distribute brochures at community events, among other things. They further link the organization with the communities it serves.

“The best way to reach people is to engage the entire community, to have their neighbors involved,” Carol explains.

“We see, as volunteers, people who have had great opportunities in their lives, and want to give back. We have retired lawyers. We’ve had a retired Supreme Court judge. We have retired nurses mentoring students who want to go into healthcare but need to improve their literacy skills before they can attend Community College. We’re always looking for more volunteers.”

CVABE is always looking for financial support as well. Its 2015-2016 operating budget is just over $1.5 million.

Eighty-five percent comes from the Vermont Agency of Education, leaving 15 percent to be raised annually through gifts and grants from businesses (like WEC’s Community Fund), individual foundations, and voter-approved town permits, your Board of Directors credits to members.

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2. At the end of the year, when revenue exceeds expenses, these margins are allocated as capital credits to members.
3. When the Co-op’s financial condition permits, your Board of Directors decides on an amount of money that will be expedited to retire or pay a portion of the capital credits.
4. Your Co-op notifies you of how and when you’ll receive your capital credit refund.

That’s the Cooperative Difference! And if you are interested in helping others, you can easily donate your capital credits to the WEC Community Fund, refer to the notice in the top center column. See the article on page 3 on one such organization that has received help from the Community Fund, Central Vermont Adult Basic Education.

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