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Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc.
P.O. Box 8 40 Church Street
East Montpelier, VT 05651
Contact: Patty Richards, 802-223-5245

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Washington Electric Co-op Celebrates 79 Years of Rural Electric Service at Annual Meeting

East Montpelier, Vt: On May 2, Washington Electric Cooperative (WEC) welcomed 230 member-owners to its operations center in East Montpelier for the utility's 79th Annual Meeting. WEC members re-elected three incumbent board members and celebrated an outstanding safety record and robust participation in its charitable giving program. The 100% renewable electric utility faces a small rate increase in 2018, but its primary source of power, a generation plant that recovers methane from Vermont's landfill in Coventry, is performing better than ever.

WEC's members re-elected incumbents Vice President Roger Fox of Walden, Stephen Knowlton of East Montpelier and Richard Rubin of Plainfield to three open seats on its nine-member board. Candidate Steven Farnham of Plainfield was a close fourth.

Board President Barry Bernstein announced a rate increase will go into effect July 1. "We're hoping to keep this under 5%. We don't do this lightly," he promised, adding that the Public Utility Commission (PUC) will determine the final rate.

After an active year of storms, including the October 2017 windstorm that caused historic damage and outages that lasted up to a week for some, WEC members gave the utility's hardworking lineworkers a long and appreciative round of applause. General Manager Patty Richards pointed out that under difficult weather conditions that included five major storms and countless weekend weather events, WEC staff worked 939 days in a row with no lost time injuries.

Board Treasurer Don Douglas announced that WEC's landfill methane generation plant in Coventry is performing well. "Coventry is making two thirds of the electricity WEC uses," he said, saving the utility from having to purchase power on the open market. "We are one of only a few utilities in the whole country that is 100% renewable," he added, to applause. In 2017, WEC returned \$720,000 to its members through its capital credit system, he said. Capital credits, unique to co-ops, are marginal revenues returned to member-owners instead of enriching private investors or shareholders.

Richards also noted that WEC's Community Fund, supported by members through voluntary donations of capital credits, gave almost \$40,000 to small nonprofits serving WEC communities in 2017; an increase of \$10,000 more than 2016. "Part of WEC's mission is to support the communities we serve beyond just providing electricity. WEC's Community Fund makes a big difference in Central Vermont, and we're proud of that," Richards said.

The meeting's speaker was Vermont gardener, writer and radio host Charlie Nardozzi, who helped WEC develop its workplace garden in 2015. Nardozzi spoke about the benefits of workplace gardens, and offered tips for growing heirloom vegetables in Vermont's climate and designing edible landscapes before taking garden questions from the audience.

After the meeting, General Manager Patty Richards noted, "We had a great turnout tonight and the place looked fantastic. Holding the meeting at the warehouse with all our trucks and equipment felt special as we were able to highlight our core function: keeping the power on." She continued, "WEC is lucky to have a democratically engaged membership that supports our commitment to 100% renewable power sources. We have outstanding board leadership and we continually work toward improving our services to members while staying aware of our impact on our state and the environment. WEC has always shown resilience and vision, and today we celebrate that. Going forward we're prepared to demonstrate both those qualities in how we respond to weather events and how we empower our members to move off fossil fuels." Richards said WEC is working to make its heavily forested, mountainous grid more resilient to storms, and is ramping up its Button Up program, which offers financial incentives for members to make energy-efficient, carbon-free updates to their homes, heating and transportation systems.

Washington Electric Co-op is a member-owned, not-for-profit electric utility founded in 1939. WEC serves approximately 10,800 member-owners in 41 towns throughout Washington, Orange, Caledonia and Orleans counties with power generated from 100% renewable sources. WEC is an equal opportunity provider and employer. For more information please visit washingtonelectric.coop or call 802-223-5245.

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