

Meet JJ Vandette: WEC's Inaugural Director of Special Projects and Innovation



JJ Vandette is WEC's new Director of Special Projects and Innovation. A Co-op member from Middlesex, Vandette brings WEC more than a decade of expertise in energy efficiency project management.

WEC welcomed 2024 with a new member on its senior leadership team. In the first days of the new year, JJ Vandette joined WEC staff as the Co-op's first Director of Special Projects and Innovation.

opportunities to learn from the past and use that to steer the ship," he said.

In his new role at WEC, he will combine learning from the past with a very recent rush of federal funding

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Other Vermont utilities, including Green Mountain Power and Vermont Electric Co-op, have senior positions with "Innovation" in the title. It's a word that suggests the meeting of ideas and action—but what does it mean in practice? "The title has innovation in it, but a lot of work I'll do is optimization," specified Vandette: "More impact, less effort."

Vandette's goal is to make sure WEC captures all the public funding it is eligible for, to keep rates as affordable as possible for members. That also means identifying opportunities to partner with others in Vermont's electric utility sector, in order to access grants or scale opportunities. Another area of optimization is to assess WEC's resources: identifying and ramping up underused ones to more fully meet their potential, and investing wisely in new ones.

A project manager by training and at heart, Vandette said he enjoys projects that require strategic planning. "It forces you to look historically, find trends and barriers, and plan out multiple years. I like

ANNUAL MEETING DINNER RESERVATION WEC'S 85th Annual Meeting • Thursday, May 2, 2024

BARRE AUDITORIUM – 16 Auditorium Hill, Barre, VT 05641

4:30 pm registration • 5 pm featured speaker • 5:30 pm buffet opens

Return Form by Friday, April 19 – WEC, Attn: Admin Asst., PO Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651

Return this dinner reservation form by April 19 to receive dinner at no charge. Dinner at no charge is by RESERVATION ONLY.

Walk-ins will be charged: \$22 – Adult; \$12 – Child (ages 10+); Children under 10 free. (No guarantee that meals will be available for those who do not register in advance). No-shows will incur a \$3 charge on their May electric bill.

The buffet will have a variety of foods, including vegetarian/vegan and gluten-free options. For special food requests not indicated below, additional accessibility needs, or questions, please contact us at (802) 223-5245 by April 19.

Dinner is an Annual Meeting tradition. However, any member may decline dinner and attend the Annual Meeting only for the business portion of the program.

Registration also available online at www.wec.coop/annual-meeting

| | Member | Guest | Child/Age |
|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
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Special food requests/accessibility needs: _____

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Please do not return this form in ballot envelope.

Washington Electric Cooperative
East Montpelier, VT 05651

Inside

Weather trends: Proactive updates during outages, Irasburg truck accident, GMP's zero outages initiative. President's and General Manager's message, p. 2

Act fast for fast charging grants: Grants for EV fast-charging at public attractions and elsewhere. P. 7

Meet the candidates: Four candidates have declared their intention to run for three seats on the Board of Directors. P. 6

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Puzzles! New in 2024, look for word searches, crosswords, and other puzzles developed by Betsy Allen, WEC Board Member and Co-op Currents' new Puzzle Editor. See "Electric Grid," p. 8.

President's and General Manager's Message

Weather Trends and Today's Priorities

Storms impact Vermont rural utilities in patterns of threes; welcoming JJ Vandette and Pat Barnes; acknowledging Dan Couture and Elaine Gonier; grant and legislative updates

Weather and Outage Management

Louis: Weather and outage management continue to be a major focus area not just for Washington Electric, but for our fellow electric distribution utilities.

Where and how the weather hits makes a tremendous difference as to what the outages look like. We had a string of six storms since mid-November. The first two are what I'd call a normal significant outage for us. The second two were fairly light for us. During the back-to-back January windstorms, we had between 800-1,000 members out at peak, and were able to restore them within a day. The way those storms tracked, Vermont Electric Co-op [VEC] was unlucky to have significant outages, and they were still hard at work restoring the first

storm when the second storm hit. We've noticed storm impacts grouped by threes, interestingly. Each of the three major rural utilities—Green Mountain Power [GMP], VEC, and Washington Electric Co-op—experiences storms differently. Major storms cause outages in all three utilities' service areas, but in each case, one utility territory was hit far harder than the others. For example, it was Washington Electric's bad luck to get the brunt of the Christmas 2022 storm. GMP faced major outages in southern Vermont after the March 2023 storm. Those back-to-back windstorms caused a lot of damage to VEC to the north of us. It makes a huge difference where the winds and heavy wet precipitation hit.

Those three examples are interesting in part because for each

utility that was hardest hit, it took five to six days to fully restore power in their territory. It was true for us last Christmas; last March, GMP took five days to restore power, the recent windstorms took VEC six days before full restoration.

Those are long periods of time. It's not that one utility or another is better prepared, or faster. It depends on where the weather hits. It also demonstrates why Washington Electric doesn't typically hire outside crews ahead of storms. We just can't be sure we're going to need them, so it doesn't make sense for us to use our members' money that way. Out of the last two months, we had help from outside crews for two storms. We didn't have enough outages to require them for the other storms.

Steve: It's rolling the dice. For GMP, planning for a storm, the odds are they need outside crews, because their service area is larger and more diverse than WEC's. For smaller utilities like VEC, the odds are lower that we will need outside help. In any case, we're not competing in restoring service. All of us are using the resources we have and can procure to get power restored as rapidly as possible. Louis, can you talk about how Vermont utilities provide mutual aid for each other in major outage situations?

Louis: It's a great point. Over Christmas of 2022, both VEC and GMP and a dozen other utilities and contractors sent us crews. In March of 2023, we sent at least one crew to help GMP. In January, we sent a couple of crews to VEC. Whenever a utility finishes restoration in their territory, they send crews to assist other utilities in Vermont and beyond as needed. While Washington Electric is smaller and can't contribute as many lineworkers as our larger utility neighbors, we certainly provide mutual aid to fellow utilities as we can.

Anybody who lives in rural electric territory in the northeast can expect to have outages and extended outage duration. The many storms we've had in the past year bear that out.

Steve: I believe WEC has done well recovering from difficult outages this year. As Louis often says, the intensity of storms is increasing, the nature of outages is getting more severe. A big challenge we all face is adapting to the shifts in weather apparently resulting from climate change.

Last issue, we had a brief discussion about GMP's zero-outages initiative. Particularly after major outage events, some WEC members approach us to ask how we'll address these challenges.

Louis: I have an answer. There are things we can do around the margins. But we live in the country in bad and worsening storms, and outages are going to keep coming, and be worse than they used to be.

Steve: I recently attended a conference where, addressing this topic, a *Wall Street Journal* tech reporter said, "You can not expect the solutions of tomorrow to provide the needs for today." In five or ten years we'll continue to see today's new ideas being tested and implemented. But today's new ideas may not be today's immediate priorities. Let's talk about today's priorities: I believe we have a personnel announcement.

WEC Hires Director of Innovation and Special Projects

Louis: I'm pleased to announce JJ Vandette has joined the staff of Washington Electric as our Director of Innovation and Special Projects. There's an introduction to JJ on page one; here I will describe why we created this new senior management role. Electric utilities in Vermont and elsewhere are going through a tremendous period of change, experiencing both challenges and opportunities. That's particularly true for Washington Electric. In addition to the systemic changes all utilities are going through, Washington Electric is experiencing changes in our operations and business. The purpose of this new position is to help us manage those changes in a productive and efficient way, and to make sure outside support, especially federal support that WEC members are entitled to and deserve a share of, is accessed to implement those changes.

The change to a more advanced metering system is the number one project JJ is going to work on. This has a lot of potential to change the

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Co-op Currents

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The Board of Directors' regularly scheduled meetings are on the last Wednesday of each month, in the evening. Members are welcome to attend. Members who wish to discuss a matter with the Board should contact the president through WEC's office. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. For information about times and/or agenda, or to receive a copy of the minutes of past meetings, contact us, at 224-2322, or visit wec.coop/board.

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way Washington Electric operates, in terms of saving our members money and outage management. We can envision many, many eventual projects like that: from utility-size batteries to improving our internal computer systems. That's the purpose of the job, from my perspective.

JJ has a long history of work in the energy efficiency utility world. Energy efficiency is one of the major initiatives Washington Electric and its member ratepayers have been interested in advancing in our mission. He's a good fit both in the work his role will entail and also in Washington Electric's long-held culture and priorities.

Steve: *Co-op Currents* readers and WEC members may remember JJ ran for the WEC Board a few years ago, and received respectable support from the membership in his bid for election. I'm glad to see he'll be working with WEC, if not on the Board, then as part of the staff.

Appreciating Dan Couture and Elaine Gonier

Louis: I also want to acknowledge and thank Dan Couture and Elaine Gonier, both of whom retired from Washington Electric in January. They both contributed good and dedicated service for our members for many years.

Dan, our Systems Maintenance Technician, served for 13 years. He was one of the stalwarts of Washington Electric: a jack of all trades serving as stockkeeper, making sure equipment and tools are there when line crews need them, working to keep Wrightsville operating, providing disconnects and meter work, and doing all around great work for our members day to day and during outages.

Elaine was a longtime Member Services Representative and retired as Senior Member Services Representative after 21 years at WEC. She had the frontline responsibility for representing Washington Electric to its members. In an organization that has a lot of difficult jobs in it, hers was both rewarding and also very difficult at times, as she often worked directly with members during some of their most challenging times.



In five or ten years we'll continue to see today's new ideas being tested and implemented. But today's new ideas may not be today's immediate priorities.

— Stephen Knowlton

Gordon Matheson is being promoted to Senior Member Services Representative; we will hire for a Member Services Representative and a Stockkeeper. I am grateful for Dan and Elaine's commitment and good work and wish them both a very happy retirement.

WEC Directors Appoint Pat Barnes of Vershire

Steve: The Board of Directors appointed Pat Barnes from Vershire to fill the vacancy on the Board. Pat, like JJ, ran for the Board in 2022. We had three members who indicated their interest in being appointed to the seat vacated by

Roger [Fox]. Each brought their own experiences and strengths, and each had good first-choice support among Directors. Pat was ultimately selected not only for his experience and skills. Cooperatives are democratically run, and we feel that boards work best when their composition reflects the diversity of their membership. The Board as a whole felt that appointing a qualified member from outside the area around Montpelier, where most elected Board members live, would help us improve geographical representation from our wider service territory.

Louis: Some utilities deal with this by having districts, like Vermont Electric Co-op. The WEC Board is rightfully paying attention to geographic diversity, even though districts are not a requirement for us.

Statewide GRIP Grant Application: Take 2

Louis: All of Vermont's electric utilities got together to apply for a federal Grid Resiliency Innovation Partnership grant, or GRIP grant, funded through the Inflation Reduction Act [IRA]. The grant is for battery storage at various levels: home level as well as distribution utility level. We did not get the grant in our first attempt; we're trying again.

Steve: Nationwide only 20% of GRIP applications were approved. It's challenging. A lot of utilities are applying. That's good, but it makes for a very competitive grant process.

Louis: Frankly, I'm excited that all Vermont's electric utilities, the

Department of Public Service [DPS], and VELCO could come together to put together a grant. It shows the level of cooperation of all utilities in the state, and the productive relationship between utilities and the DPS. Hopefully, on top of that, we'll get the grant this time.

Legislative Update

Louis: Washington Electric has been part of an off-session working group to examine the state's renewable energy purchasing mandates and whether those should be updated. We expect a bill will be introduced in the legislature to implement a version of what was agreed to by the members of that working group.

For Washington Electric, the most significant piece the working group agreed to is an acceleration of the timeline for all utilities to become 100% renewable. Washington Electric has for years now been 100% renewable, and is also supportive of all Vermonters having access to 100% renewable electricity while also advocating for that to happen at as reasonable a price as is practical.

It's not just that people struggle to pay their bills, including electric bills. It's that if the cost of renewable power goes up too fast and too rapidly, people will not be able to use electricity for heating and transportation. Electricity accounts for only 2% of the carbon load produced by Vermonters, whereas transportation and heat each



It's not that one utility or another is better prepared, or faster. It depends on where the weather hits.

— Louis Porter

account for about 36%. So, the goal is to use electricity for heating and transportation.

If this change is introduced, the practical effect for WEC is that load growth in our territory will not only have to be renewable, but not include additional hydro power beyond what WEC uses now.

There will be some cost, because whenever you constrain where you purchase power from, it incrementally increases the price of power. The benefit is moving the state to a 100% renewable standard and all Vermonters having

access to all-renewable electricity as Washington Electric members do now. It would also curtail, to some extent, group net metering, and as readers of *Co-op Currents* know, the Board and I have become concerned about the unnecessary increase in rates attributed to net metering, and the gradual cost shift to less well off from better off members. This bill hasn't even had testimony yet so there's a long way to go.

Steve: Looking at what other Vermonters hope to see in this proposed bill, the business perspective includes the promise of jobs and growth for some time to come. There's the Vermont electric ratepayers, who have said in recent surveys that they value affordability and reliability. Hopefully what links all stakeholders is the desire to evolve our entire power portfolio to be as clean as possible. 🐸

Emergency Resources

Financial and energy coaching

Contact your local Community Action Agency: Capstone at capstonevt.org or Northeast Kingdom Community Action at nekcavt.org.

Fuel

Running out of fuel? No matter where in Vermont you live, if you are in danger of running out of fuel this winter, call the toll-free Emergency Fuel Assistance number: 1-800-479-6151

Mental health: call 988

If you are in distress or crisis, call 988.

If you prefer to text, text VT to 741741 to reach a crisis counselor quickly.

For peer support, call/text 833-888-2557

More resources are at mentalhealth.vermont.gov

Food

Vermont Foodbank: 800-585-2265.

Capstone Community Action: capstonevt.org

Northeast Kingdom Community Action: nekcavt.org

3SquaresVT: 855-855-6181, vermontfoodhelp.com

211

Call 211 to find any emergency resource you need: food, mental health, fuel, shelter, and anything else.

WEC Offers Presentations

Want a visit from WEC for your school, office, neighborhood association, or community group? As a member-owned cooperative, WEC staff love opportunities to help our community learn about power and electrical safety.

- **Safety demonstrations:** David Young: 802-224-2340 or david.young@wec.coop
- **New technologies and how our grid works:** Energy Coach Bill Powell: 802-224-2329 or energycoach@wec.coop

JJ Vandette*continued from page 1*

and ever-evolving tech opportunities. “The common arc is trying to tie dollars and partnerships to get funding today to allow the Co-op to reach its long-term goals. Not just to get today’s work done, but to anticipate what’s coming. It’s hard to do. That’s the challenge of it,” he smiled.

Project management in changing times

Vandette is an attentive listener who sports a streaked beard and has the focused energy of an endurance athlete: he’s thru-hiked both the Appalachian Trail and Long Trail (which he’s hiked again, in sections). He comes to WEC from a 13-year career at the Vermont Energy Investment Corporation (VEIC), which is the parent organization of Efficiency Vermont. Early on, he showed aptitude for understanding projects both globally and in a hands-on sense, working to evolve the offerings of the energy efficiency utility and earning the respect of others in the field with his curiosity about everything at the crossroads of energy and economy.

His interest in that intersection led him to study environmental studies and marketing at the University of Utah—that and the promise of snorkel days on the slopes, a big attraction to an avid snowboarder from southern New Hampshire. Vandette returned east to work at VEIC, he said, because he decided to focus his career on long-term economic decisions that are also good for the environment, and that “drew me into energy efficiency out of the gate.”

At VEIC, Vandette worked on energy efficiency in agriculture, helping to bring new technologies to Vermont’s dairy farmers and commercial sugarmakers. As he developed his knack for project management, he began managing a research and development portfolio, recognizing underused resources and making it easier for staff to use them better. Because Efficiency Vermont has regulatory obligations as an energy efficiency utility, he explained, “streamlining existing processes that help fellow staff focus on deliverables takes pressure off of staff.” The deliverable, often, was a project or process that created a doorway to the future. The projects Vandette managed were “right up against the line of regulatory boundaries, like PowerShift,” he said.

Happy Retirement, Dan Couture and Elaine Gonier

Congratulations to Maintenance Technician Dan Couture, retired after 13 years at WEC, and Senior Member Services Representative Elaine Gonier, retired after 21 years. Your friends and colleagues at WEC wish you both a very happy retirement!

Board of Directors Appoints Pat Barnes of Vershire

Pat Barnes of Vershire has been appointed by the Board of Directors to fill the seat vacated by former Vice President Roger Fox. That seat is open for election in 2024. Learn more about Barnes in his candidate statement on page 6.

2024 Rebates for Your Home



If you’re planning on **improving the efficiency of your home or apartment** this year, take a look at these residential offers, including:

**Air Sealing and Insulation**

- 75% off weatherization project costs, up to \$9,500 (completed by an Efficiency Excellence Network contractor)
- DIY weatherization: \$100 back on select do-it-yourself projects

**Heating, Cooling, and Water Heating**

- Air-source heat pumps: discounts starting at \$350 + income bonus
- Ground source heat pump: up to \$2,100/ton + \$500 income bonus
- Smart thermostats: \$100 rebate for select ENERGY STAR models
- Water heaters: \$300-\$600 for select heat pump water heaters + \$200 income bonus
- Window air conditioners: \$100 rebate for select ENERGY STAR models
- Wood pellet furnaces & boilers: \$6,000 rebate
- Wood and pellet stoves: \$400 discount at select retailers

**Electric Vehicles**

- Up to \$6,500 in local incentives and up to a \$7,500 federal tax credit

**ENERGY STAR® Appliances**

- \$25-\$40 for dehumidifiers
- \$200-\$400 rebate on heat pump clothes dryers
- \$400 for heat pump dryer/washer combination units

**Lighting**

- \$100 rebate for qualifying LED fixtures for indoor growing.

**Income-based Assistance**

- Free lighting, appliances, energy consultations, and more — visit efficiencyvermont.com/free-products to see if you are eligible.

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**Not sure where to start?**

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All rebates are subject to availability and eligibility.
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**Efficiency
Vermont**

PowerShift is a partnership between WEC, Efficiency Vermont, and the Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA) in which members can receive a Level 2 charger at no cost, and in exchange, agree to a schedule that charges their EV in off-peak hours to reduce peak power costs. Vandette first worked with WEC on an early version of PowerShift that

marshaled members to use their hot water tanks as a source of stored energy that the Co-op could draw from to mitigate costs during peak power use periods. Even in 2018, the project assumed electric vehicle batteries would eventually replace water tanks as its storage focus; at this point in time, PowerShift is exclusively focused on EVs. WEC’s Director of Products & Services, Bill Powell, worked with Vandette on PowerShift before they became Co-op colleagues. Powell explained that they are still working to reach member EV drivers who are not enrolled in PowerShift: if many of those drivers charge during peak hours, it can drive up peak demand and increase WEC’s power supply costs. Meanwhile, vehicle-to-grid experiments across the globe are testing how micro-utility tech interacts with EV owner behavior.

“This stuff is here faster than we imagined,” Vandette said cheerfully.

The electric industry experienced modest levels of change between 1939, when the Co-op was founded, and 2009, when Vandette was starting his career. Then, he pointed out, “electric vehicles and batteries at home were just dreams.” But over those past 15 years, the climate emergency has intensified while tech has rapidly evolved. Vandette explained, “Innovation is necessary, because the future is here. There’s a balance to be struck between innovation—and the complexities that come with changes like rate design and the integration of battery storage—and regulation, which is inherently not innovative. How do we act in the regulatory interest, and our own member-owned utility’s interest, and generally, in the interest of our environment?”

He was asking himself those questions when he worked with WEC on PowerShift five years ago. “I was





Button Up 2024 Incentives for WEC Members

Thermal Incentives

Weatherization



Efficiency Vermont

- Some Vermont residents may be eligible for 75% of project costs back, up to \$9,500 based on household income. Visit <https://www.encyvermont.com/rebates/list/home-performance-with-energy-star> to assess whether you may be eligible for enhanced incentives. Household income will be verified by Opportunities Credit Union after a project is initiated with a contractor to determine eligibility.

Heat Pump Incentives

WEC & EVT 2024 Heat Pump (HP) Incentives

| | Point of purchase discount ¹ | WEC bonus incentive ² |
|---------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Ductless - ≤2 tons | \$350 | \$100 |
| Ductless - >2 tons | \$450 | \$100 |
| Ducted - ≤2 tons | \$1,000 | \$100 |
| Ducted - >2-<4 tons | \$1,500 | \$100 |
| Ducted - ≥4 tons | \$2,000 | \$100 |
| Air to water (A2W) heat pump | \$1,000/ton | \$500 |
| Ground source heat pump (GSHP) | | |
| | EVT | WEC |
| Up to 10 tons: | \$2,100/ton | \$2,000 |
| 10-20 tons: | \$1,500/ton | \$1,000 |
| 20-50 tons | \$1,000/ton | \$ 500 |



- Point of purchase discount applied; provided by Efficiency Vermont
- Provide proof of purchase to WEC (email or USPS) to energycoach@wec.coop

Heat Pump Water Heater (Hybrid) Incentives¹

| | Point of purchase discount ¹ | WEC bonus incentive ² |
|---|---|----------------------------------|
| Replacing conventional electric hot water | Up to \$600 | - |
| Replacing fossil-fired hot water system | Up to \$600 | \$100 |

| | WEC bonus incentive |
|---|---------------------|
| Integrated Controls for Ductless Heat Pumps | \$600 |

Pellet Stoves, Furnaces, and Boilers

WEC

- WEC provides \$100 incentive for first time installation of wood or pellet stoves. Wood or pellet stove replacements: Efficiency Vermont provides a \$300 instant discount on qualified units at participating retailers for wood and pellet stoves

Efficiency Vermont*

- Central wood pellet furnaces and boilers: Work with an Efficiency Excellence Network contractor to install a wood pellet boiler or furnace and get \$6,000 back (includes \$3,000 purchase rebate and \$3,000 installer incentive).

*Offers subject to change. See EfficiencyVermont.com for current details.

802-224-2329 • energycoach@wec.coop

‘behind-the-meter’, working on the demand side of the equation, and I thought, I need to be on the other side of this sometime in the future,” he said.

Public power, cooperative control

Vandette is a WEC member himself: he lives in a farmhouse in Middlesex with his wife and their nine-month-old child. He may be familiar to fellow members from his bid to serve on the Co-op’s Board of Directors in 2022, when he received the fourth-highest number of votes (the top three vote-getters are seated) in an election with the largest and most competitive field in recent memory. It was Vandette’s first attempt, and he and his wife had only just moved to Middlesex from Burlington the year before. Other Directors noticed his resume and showing in the election; President Steve Knowlton reached out to Vandette personally to encourage

him to stay involved. Within the daily work of WEC, several staffers already knew Vandette well as a colleague in the energy efficiency community. Meanwhile, Vandette was developing a new interest to complement economics and environment: the convergence of local governance with public power.

General Manager Louis Porter was impressed with this in Vandette’s interview. When Vandette was asked why he was interested in the new position, Porter remembered, “JJ said he wanted to see the impact of his work in the community he lived in and was a part of. As a Washington Electric member, he wanted to see the results of his work. I can’t imagine a better response for anyone working in a co-op of any kind, but particularly WEC.”

Shortly before Vandette worked with WEC on PowerShift, he attended the Institute of Public Utilities at Michigan State. He went, he said, to learn

about the language and operations of utilities—in order to develop programs, like PowerShift, that bridged the missions of both Efficiency Vermont and the Co-op, as well as other electric utilities. But the institute also sharpened Vandette’s interest in public power. He discovered that he valued what differentiates public power from private power: “it’s about local control, and local cooperative control,” he explained. And it wasn’t long after that that he moved onto WEC lines and ran for the Board.

Then, when he introduced himself to neighbors in Middlesex and throughout WEC territory, seeking signatures for his candidacy, he learned a lot about the Co-op from fellow members’ perspective: not least of which was that the house he lived in was formerly owned by founding members of the Co-op, and was 101 years old when it was finally connected to a power line in 1939. “WEC’s membership is a very tuned-in demographic,” Vandette said respectfully. “There’s a sense of community here: we’re all in it together, literally connected by the wire.”

The sense of community really connected for him, he said, when he and his wife were out of state during the winter storm in the last days of 2022. No sooner had he received an outage alert on his phone, he said, than a neighbor called, on the way over to make a fire to keep their pipes from freezing. Then another neighbor called. Vandette was powerfully moved by his neighbors’ care.

Vandette is still brand-new to the Co-op, in a brand-new position. He’s still understanding the scope of his job, and while he expects the first few years of work to be mostly about fitting projects within the system behind the scenes, he looks forward to opportunities to talk with members, like at the Annual Meeting coming up in early May. After all, WEC members are his neighbors.

When Vandette thinks about this, he thinks about a point about cooperatives he’s heard from Porter, Knowlton, and Vermont Electric Co-op GM Rebecca Towne: “They all say reliability, affordability, and equity are priorities to balance. In all this work, with the ‘high water floats all boats’ mentality, I’m looking at how everyone will benefit,” he said. “A lot of my job will require keeping rate impacts top-of-mind. The more affordable rates are, the better we’ll all be.”

These days, Vandette wakes up early, before his baby, to cross-country ski before dawn. “I get up in the morning thinking about how do I get dollars to support the Co-op’s goals? How do we get as much funding as possible for projects that would otherwise be funded by rate increases? Who do we work with as partners on these projects to benefit members?” He thinks about projects with potential or already in motion, like upgrading meters and substations. “I have 100 questions as the curious new guy,” he said, but he has his mandate: “Seize new opportunities, and keep energy affordability as a primary focus.”

Have Your Finances Taken a Hit?

Don’t let your WEC bill go past due, or grow beyond what you can manage. **Help is available:** A Member Services Representative will help you put together a budget that works for you. Plus, there are state programs that may help pay down your bill.

Call us today, and we’ll help you put together a plan: 802-223-5245 or toll free at 1-800-WEC-5245.



Meet the 2024 Candidates for WEC's Board of Directors

Every year, WEC's membership elects three fellow members to serve on the Co-op's nine-seat Board of Directors. The members who serve in these critical roles oversee management of the Co-op, approve financial decisions, and make policy for the member-owned electric utility. By this issue's deadline, four candidates announced their intent to run in 2024. These candidates are Pat Barnes of Vershire, who was just appointed to the Board of Directors at the end of 2023 to fill a vacancy; Ian Buchanan of East Montpelier; Stephen Knowlton, President, of Montpelier; and Richard Rubin of Plainfield. Candidates may continue to enter the race until March 3.

In this issue of *Co-op Currents*, all known candidates introduce themselves to members. In the following Annual Meeting-themed issue, candidates may expand

on their introductory statement in answers to policy questions. See updates about the Board of Directors election and the Annual Meeting at wec.coop/annual-meeting.

How to vote

In 2024, voting will take place by mail and in person. In April, members will receive a packet containing a ballot for the Board of Directors election along with the Annual Meeting issue of *Co-op Currents*. Check the deadline to post your votes by mail. WEC members may write in names of unofficial candidates. All candidates run at-large.

WEC will hold its Annual Meeting at Barre Memorial Auditorium on Thursday, May 2. Members will be able to submit their ballots in person. 

Pat Barnes

I have been a resident of Vershire, Vermont for thirty years where my career has been dedicated to science education. In my volunteer work, I serve as an EMT and firefighter, a wilderness search and rescue responder, a Justice of the Peace and member of the Board of Civil Authority, and a past member of a school board.



I now operate a home weatherization firm dedicated to helping customers use energy more effectively. My goal is to increase comfort and reduce costs and carbon emissions, whatever energy source (petroleum, biomass, electricity) my customers choose to use.

I wish to be a member of the WEC Board to help carry our Co-op into the next era. I believe that Co-op members should be producing and consuming more electricity. Electrical energy is proving to be the most reliable, environmentally friendly, and cost-efficient source of energy. We need policies that diversify and distribute our electrical production (such as solar and wind) while encouraging the transition to efficient electrical power for heat and transportation.

The challenges we face are numerous: meeting the demand of increased electrical use; maintaining our power lines in the face of increasingly destructive storms and forest threats like the Emerald Ash Borer; increasing our grid's capacity to accommodate solar and wind power; all while delivering great service at an affordable price.

We will need to combine the right incentives and rate structures with the Co-op's clout in persuading the Vermont Public Utility Commission to craft policies that serve our members in this decade and the next.

Ian Buchanan

As a father, business owner, and (outside of eight years following college) lifelong Vermont resident, I have had a vested interest in the well-being of Vermont and its communities for a long time. I have spent the past 23 years building the business I founded and the past eight raising my daughter, Elena, with my wife, Judy. We have been WEC members in East Montpelier since 2018. My interests in energy, technology, permanence, and equity align well with the board's mission.



Strong advocacy and a willingness to compromise are frequently essential ingredients to progress. Some of our biggest challenges today, including reducing pollution and emissions while simultaneously expanding electrical capacity, require patience, pragmatism, and execution. They also often lack simple binary yes/no answers. I thrive on fleshing out long-term reality from the noise. We need to make informed decisions so that unintended negative consequences are avoided whenever possible.

As a business owner in Vermont, I am aware of the many challenges and hurdles facing service providers like WEC. I have a keen interest and qualified experience in finance, budgeting, planning, risk management, the environment, organizational assessment, and electricity-based transportation and HVAC. My goal is to help position WEC to navigate and create as successful a future as possible. This means providing all members with ample, reliable, clean electricity affordably while maintaining the integrity, sustainability, and compliance expected by regulators and members alike.

WEC is at a disadvantage to larger utilities when it comes to lobbying and leveraging economies of scale. We must be willing to learn from others

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Stephen Knowlton

I live in the White Pine community off of Dillon Rd. in East Montpelier. I have lived there since 2012, and I have been a member of Washington Electric Cooperative since 2001. Members may contact me by mail at 160 White Rock Dr. #2, Montpelier, VT 05602, by email at knowlsf@auburn.edu, or by phone at 223-2230.



Prior to moving to the Montpelier area, I have lived in a number of different places in the US and abroad, partly as a result of growing up in a military family. I graduated from Middlebury College, and later received my PhD in physics from MIT in 1984. I have spent most of my working life as a physics professor and as a researcher in the science of alternative energy experiments both domestically and overseas. I spent much of my professional career at Auburn University in Alabama, where I taught physics at all levels from introductory physics to graduate courses. While there I led a federally-supported experimental fusion energy research laboratory comprised of students, post-docs, technicians, and staff scientists. I retired from this position in 2012. Until 2022, I served as a member and vice-chair of a federal advisory committee to the Office of Science at the US Department of Energy.

In December 2014, I was appointed to serve on the Board of Directors, and I was elected to the Board in May 2015. During my time on the board, I have served on the Power and Operations Committee, Policy Committee, and Members and Marketing Committee. I was selected to be President of the Board in 2021. I was active for a number of years in the effort to facilitate broadband access for all WEC members. In local education efforts, I have acted as a mentor in U-32 high school's Branching Out program on several projects, and also serve as a

science advisor to the Vermont Energy Education Project. I am a member of the Vermont Academy of Science and Engineering, and until January 2024 served on its board as treasurer.

Richard Rubin

I have lived on East Hill in Plainfield for more than 50 years. I am married to Jayne Israel. We have three children and five grandchildren. I enjoy hiking, skiing, gardening, golf, and hanging out with my grandchildren. My email address is richardirubin@gmail.com



I was born and raised outside of Boston. I attended Harvard College, and law school at the University of Pennsylvania. I have practiced law in Barre for 40 years. My law firm is Rubin, Kidney, Myer & Vincent. 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.

I have served as a WEC Director for 20 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.

Candidate announcements on wec.coop!

Board candidates may enter the race until March 3. To learn about all current candidates, visit wec.coop/annual-meeting.



Broadband Update: CVFiber Expands In the New Year

CVFiber expands into East Montpelier and Worcester and continues to connect customers in additional parts of Calais. Aerial installations are being scheduled throughout the winter season. Underground conduit installations will pause until the ground thaws in the spring. Construction of the network will continue throughout the winter season in some portions of the towns of Woodbury, Worcester, and Middlesex. This expansion builds upon the work that has already been completed, including the recent October 2023 launch of the network.

"We are excited to connect more customers in new service areas. CVFiber's New Year's resolution is to continue the progress in bringing locally managed, world-class Internet service to the doorsteps of Central Vermonters. Eligible service areas can now sign up by selecting their package on our website, cvfiber.net. Preregistration is encouraged for areas that are currently under construction," said CVFiber Executive Director Jennille Smith.

Proactive operational planning is happening now to prepare for 2025. This includes network design, permitting and licensing. Learn more at CVFiber.net.

WEC is Hiring

Union Position: Stockkeeper Class A or B

The stockkeeper position is responsible for purchasing, receiving, storing, and issuing utility equipment, materials, supplies and tools to operation personnel for their daily work schedules as well as during outage restoration efforts.

Union Position: Mechanic Class A or B

The mechanic will be responsible for servicing and maintaining all Cooperative vehicles and equipment. Qualified applicants must at a minimum be proficient with diesel and gas engines, hydraulics, tire changes, electrical wiring, welding, fabrication, off road equipment and all mechanical work.

Union Position: Member Services Representative

Reliable, detail-oriented person with excellent customer service skills needed in a fast-paced, team-oriented office that works with WEC members to perform a variety of billing functions and data entry. Primary duties of the position include answering the telephone, working with members, responding to billing inquiries, receiving and processing payments, collecting delinquent accounts, and entering billing data.

For more information about the above positions' responsibilities and requirements, visit washingtonelectric.coop/employment. Send letters of interest to WEC's Human Resources Dept., c/o Teia Greenslit, Director of Finance & Administration, PO Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651 or teia.greenslit@wec.coop. WEC is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Act Fast: EV Fast Charging Grants for Public Attractions - And More

Charge Vermont is offering grants to public attractions to support installing electric vehicle charging equipment. Act fast to apply for DC Fast Charger grants: pre-applications are due February 29. Applications for Level 2 chargers are accepted until early 2026.

The Charge Vermont grants provide support and 90-100% of the funding required for charger installation, including planning, hardware, and electric system upgrades.

The charger must be located in the attraction's parking lot and be available to the general public.

Charge Vermont also offers EV charging grants for multi-unit residences and workplaces. Visit ChargeVermont.com for details and to apply.

New tool: IRA Savings Calculator

How much money can you get with the Inflation Reduction Act? A new savings calculator is available at RewiringAmerica.org.

Fill in your information to see your point of sale discounts, available tax credits, and estimated annual energy savings.

Direct link: rewiringamerica.org/app/ira-calculator

Ian Buchanan

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while innovating and making calculated investments of our own. Simultaneously, we need to maintain awareness of how the pursuit of perfection can easily be the enemy of fulfilling the very good.

The past should be respected, but it is important to be dynamic and proactive; WEC needs to be a future facing organization.

As a productive and committed member of the WEC Board, I will work hard and advocate for the members as

ASK THE ENERGY COACH

How do I balance outage preparation with reducing my carbon footprint?



Dear Energy Coach: My New Year's resolution is to reduce my personal carbon footprint as much as I can within my own power and budget. I am starting with a list of opportunities and obstacles. One major concern I have is that if I rely too much on electricity for everything, power outages will really put a dog in my canoe. Can you help me get started?

It's a great resolution, and financially, it's great timing. Federal funding through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) means incentives are more generous than we've seen before. Your priorities will depend on what you currently have and your lifestyle. Have you had a home energy audit? Are you preparing to switch from a combustion engine vehicle to an electric vehicle? What is the status of your water heater? I'm happy to walk through these with you individually. In the broadest possible terms, though, here's where I would begin:

- Know your 2023 household income. Incentives are frequently tied to income.
- Check the IRA savings calculator at RewiringAmerica.org.
- If you've already had an energy audit, those results can help you prioritize your changes in terms of bang-for-buck. See what resources Efficiency Vermont offers for the improvements you want to make. If you haven't had an energy audit, you can use their site to find a contractor to provide one.
- As you know, some changes require planning ahead—especially if you're adding to your electric load. If you're adding new electric devices, follow my checklist on this same page.

You have an excellent point with your concern about relying solely on electricity when outages remain a reality. The only way through this particular dilemma is preparation. Again, that will look different person to person. It will help you to understand the amount of backup you need: a well-stocked outage kit and a mutual aid agreement with neighbors? A battery option that can power a phone and laptop? A full-house generator system? Whatever you need to do to be prepared for multi-day outages, take the time to do it. It will make outages that much more bearable, wherever you are on your path toward carbon-free.

Find resources here:

IRA Savings Calculator: rewiringamerica.org/app/ira-calculator

Efficiency Vermont: efficiencyvermont.com

WEC's Outage Checklist: washingtonelectric.coop

Have an energy question? Ask the Energy Coach: energycoach@wec.coop

Adding New Electric Devices? Follow the Energy Coach's Checklist

Buying an EV? Installing a new heat pump water heater? Before you plug in, follow these steps.

1. **Look at your circuit breaker box.** Is it a 100 or 200 amp box? How many remaining slots are there? Take a photo.
2. **Call the Energy Coach** to inquire about adding an your peak load. What's your historic peak load? If you email, attach the photo.
3. **Complete a Load Sheet** (look for it on the Energy Coach section of wec.coop, or direct link: wec.coop/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Load-Sheet-06-2023-1.pdf) to be eligible for a Level 2 charger provided from WEC at no cost to you (to be installed by your contractor).
4. **WEC's team will assess your service.** You'll learn what, if any, work needs to be done to prepare your home electrically, about how long it will take, and how much it will cost.

Service upgrades typically involve separately hiring a qualified contractor, and coordinating with WEC to make electrical improvements to increase capacity of the member's equipment. Supply chain issues remain, but WEC is starting to perform elective service upgrades again. If you need an elective service upgrade, completing this process will put you on the list.

a whole. I look forward to continuing to learn about the complexities that drive the greater electrical grid, proposing well-vetted ideas, and contributing to the team that helps make it all work. I am grateful for the opportunity to earn

your vote.

I can be reached at 802-595-3828 or isb900@gmail.com. Please don't hesitate to reach out to discuss energy in general or WEC in particular.



Safety Minute: Preventing House Fires 1: Outlet Safety

Electrical safety tips from Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist David Young

House fires used to be a lot more common than they are today. There are three things a fire needs: fuel, air, and a heat source. Oil lamps and candles were the heat sources that caused most house fires, so buildings in WEC's service area became much safer in 1939 onward, as they were wired for electric light. However, electricity can still cause fires when wires are misinstalled or when electrical connections are loose. You do not want your electric wiring to become a heat source.



David Young, Safety and Environmental Compliance Specialist

than watching a Youtube tutorial. Home inspectors make sure everything is wired correctly—which is an important reason inspection is usually a condition of selling or buying a home. But even in a properly wired home, tune in to your outlets.

If you have outlets you use a lot, they loosen over time. Let's say you have a crockpot on your counter that you regularly plug in to the same outlet. After ten or so years of high use, there won't be much tension left in the outlet, and you'll be able to tell when you can pull out the plug with no effort. A new outlet has quite a bit of grip on the

prongs. That tight connection to the wire keeps the wire cooler. If there's a lot of wiggle, heat can build up, which melts the insulation on the wire. An outlet is stapled to a stud or the wood in your wall, so you've got something getting really hot, the heat goes to the wood. Wood releases a gas, and gas is flammable.

If you want to check the tension in your outlets, there's a tool that retails for about \$80. Or, purchase a brand new outlet—they are inexpensive—and take it around your house comparing its tension with all your other outlets.

Here's what you need to know:

1. If you go to unplug something and it feels warm, there may be an issue. The heat can be from heavy use, or it's an indication the outlet needs

to be replaced. If it unplugs really easily, that's an indication the outlet is the likely culprit.

2. If you identify any loose outlets, hire a licensed electrician to replace them for you. This should not be a high-cost service.
3. Keep space heaters away from walls and flammable items. If the cord feels warm, it's an indication there may be an electrical issue. 



Members can request safety presentations from David Young for their school, organization, or community group. Contact him at 802-224-2340 or david.young@wec.coop.

Puzzle by Betsy Allen

Electric Grid

A R I C E J G Z G D X M G W D
 T B A I O R E N A Q P B T L B
 J Q S E E V N V G Q O H R T Q
 L R R A L D E Z D K L O A W Y
 D E U P E N R N W I E A N B C
 O N W S C H A J T O S Q S E R
 C E J O T G T W O R U Y F B M
 Y W I L R S E I U Q Y A O E X
 M A D A I L R N T P Z G R E B
 F B N R C X O D A T Q R M N Y
 A L U Y I B A M G Y O I E V J
 Q E I O T Z X X E M H D R Z R
 C L F V Y S U B S T A T I O N
 P E V K I L O W A T T S K F E
 Q V F I O C Y R H Y D R O U E

transformer
kilowatts
outages
generate

electricity
Coventry
poles
solar

substation
hydro
renewable

grid
wind

Outage Q+A

Why is the power restored on one side of the road, and off on the other?

Q: During a recent storm, my power was restored within a day. My friend on the other side of the hill from me was not so lucky, and was out for four days. How does this happen?

A: Even though the electric grid is interconnected, it's not interchangeable from one utility to another. Within one utility's service area, power to one area can be rerouted from another area, but this option is very site specific and depends on the scale of damage and where the damage is located. Electricity travels on transmission lines to substations: from there, it travels out on distribution lines. You can have two power lines across the road from each other that are differently affected by outage-causing factors, like weather and trees, depending on which substation they're traveling from. Rural utilities' distribution lines often travel through heavily wooded areas. If, for example, your house is served from a roadside distribution line, and your friend up the hill is served by a distribution line that travels through the woods, that line may be more vulnerable to tree damage—and more difficult and time consuming to fix—than the roadside distribution line that serves your property. 

