Adapting To A Post-Irene World
VT Project Offers Replacement For The Mobile Home

Tropical Storm Irene started a lot of conversations in Vermont. The August 2011 storm laid bare Vermont’s unpreparedness for an era of powerful, extreme weather. In the wake of some $800 million in damages (by one estimate), we began to reconsider some of our patterns upon the landscape — for example, rehabilitating the banks along river corridors with the understanding that they must allow the rivers room to move. Another reconsideration was housing. Irene caused the worst flooding in Vermont since 1938, damaging or destroying some 3,500 homes. Partly this was a reflection that Vermonters had grown complacent about building in floodplains, but it also had to do with the poor structural quality of many residences. The High Meadows Fund – a grant-making organization associated with the Vermont Community Foundation, with a particular interest in projects to mitigate climate-change impacts – studied the issue, and fund President Gaye Symington shared the findings with other organizations, including Efficiency Vermont (EVT).

“It turned out that Irene caused a disproportionate amount of damage to mobile homes,” says EVT Senior Consultant Peter Schneider. “Fifteen percent of the mobile homes in the state were made uninhabitable, yet they accounted for only 7 percent of the housing stock. This was caused by a combination of being poorly sited, within the 100-year floodplain, but also not anchored to the ground, making them more vulnerable to weather events.”

The participants in this conversation reached another conclusion that was not a surprise: mobile homes (the correct term, since the 1970s, is actually “manufactured homes”) fail to hold their value and structural integrity. They are, of course, inexpensive homes to purchase, but they’re a classic example, Symington says, of the adage that it’s “expensive to be poor.”

“Mobile homes aren’t treated like a house, as an appreciating asset,” she explains. “It’s more like you’re buying a boat and paying on a credit card. So if you’re buying new and you need a loan, it’s typically at a high rate of interest.”

What’s more, their value starts falling practically as soon as they’re installed on-site, so as you make your payments and move toward outright ownership you have less and less to show for it.

The damage to this vulnerable segment of Vermont’s housing stock continued on page 4

Battery Recycling
Another First for Vermont
WEC Will Be Glad to Take Y ours Off Y our Hands

For lots of folks in Vermont, alkaline batteries – the simple household battery; A, A6, AA, 9-volts, button-sized, you name it – have presented a moral dilemma. Nearly everyone buys and uses them, but when it came to disposing of them the waste-collection and recycling services have mostly told us to just throw them away.

That hasn’t set well with a lot of people, including those at WEC. Vermonters in general have a better-developed sense of environmental ethics than people in some other parts of the country. Tossing these metal objects filled with chemical elements into the trashcan, where they’ll eventually end up in the Coventry landfill, has simply felt wrong.

Fortunately, the Legislature felt our pain. In 2014 it passed Act 139, creating “PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP FOR PRIMARY BATTERIES AND RECHARGEABLE BATTERIES.” The law went into effect at the beginning of this year. Not surprisingly, Vermont is the first state to adopt legislation stating that manufacturers cannot....
Want An Antidote to the Constant Bad News? You’re Holding It, in This Issue of Co-op Currents

By Barry Bernstein

A few of my close friends, WEC members, joke with me about focusing the beginning of my President’s message most of the time on the weather, but I can’t help it. When you have been part of our WEC Co-op family for a long time you are keenly aware of the effects weather has on our line crews, office staff, budgets, expenses, and how it directly affects our members. We have been very fortunate in 2015 and thus far in 2016 in avoiding significant storms and outages, while the rest of the East and the Midwest have had extensive snow. As I write this my front lawn and driveway are like a skating rink, probably not too different from many of you. It has been a strange “winter” thus far.

With all of the news, we often hear and read about the many negative things going on in the world, and too often locally. I wanted to emphasize some positive items. There are two articles in this issue of the Co-op Currents that focus on WEC’s Community Fund, which is built up each year through our members’ contributions of their capital credit refunds, and gives donations to nonprofit organizations in our service territory. In 2015, there were 56 local organizations that received support from our Community Fund. Those contributions totaled $52,713.

It was the fourteenth year the WEC Community Fund has been in existence. One of the articles highlights Good Beginnings of Central Vermont, an organization that focuses on families and their new members – before the babies arrive and continuing after they’re born. Together, each of our members’ small capital credit donations – which can be committed on an ongoing basis, a single time, or year-to-year, as the member decides – combine to have a larger impact on this organization’s capacity to help families in our community get a better foundation. It’s heartening to see the good work that these selfless and generous volunteers do, and encouraging to know that in a small way we help make that happen.

Please consider calling the WEC office and seeing how you can contribute to our Community Fund. If you are not already doing so. I should mention an additional giving option available to our members through our Roundup program, where your monthly electric bill is rounded up to the next dollar, and that extra few cents is added to everyone else’s and given to WARMTH, helping folks in need with their heating bills. (You can also use Roundup to add a specific amount of money for WARMTH. I have the folks at the WEC office add $5 to my bill every month.)

Another focus in this issue highlights a very significant positive development – the VERMOD home (see page one) that was given “birth” as a result of the tragedy of Tropical Storm Irene. The efforts of the people and organizations that came together to create a net zero modular home that can benefit Vermonters of modest income – providing them an opportunity to own a well-constructed home that’s healthy and comfortable to live in, and affordable to operate – is another example of good works being done by Vermonters for the benefit of our communities and fellow citizens. It may be at its beginning stage, but as someone who worked on the “affordable” part of this equation in a similar effort 45 years ago, without success, my congratulations and thanks go out to the people involved with the Modular Housing Innovation Project.

It’s great people-to-people efforts like the two mentioned above that keep me hopeful and optimistic that we can address the many challenges ahead.

A significant departure

One of those people-to-people persons, WEC Administrative Assistant Debbie Brown, will be leaving WEC, after 15 years, to retire and spend more time with her husband Ron and their family. Debbie Brown has been one of my life mentors – always positive, always willing to help someone else out, whether at work, in her community, or someone else’s community. During the storm called Damon, in December 2014, Debbie organized all of us – board, staff, family members of our staff, and members of her own family – to show up before 5 a.m., morning and be there each night until late evening, making sure all our WEC and visiting crews got a hot breakfast and hot dinner, and a bag lunch for the day. After each meal Debbie and her volunteers had to see to it that the groceries were purchased and the kitchen was ready to serve the next meal. This went on for nearly nine days.

Debbie did the same things for our annual meetings, board and staff meetings, etc. She has always led by example, with a great laugh and with straightforwardness when you needed to hear it; yet, always respectful. On behalf of our Board, our employees, and our membership, we wish her the best in her retirement from WEC, and many, many thanks for making our Co-op a better place.

A volunteer with Good Beginnings of Central Vermont entertains a baby during a home visit. Volunteers provide a welcome break for new mothers, help with various tasks, and can give guidance about local support services and resources.

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 agenda, or to receive a copy of the minutes of past meetings, contact General Manager Patty Richards, 802-223-5245.

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Three member/owners of Washington Electric Cooperative have come forward as candidates for the Co-op’s Board of Directors in 2016. If elected, each will serve for three years, their terms ending in 2019.

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 policy and 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 are Barry Bernstein of East Calais, Annie Reed of Marshfield, and Roy Folsom of Cabot. All three are incumbents and are seeking re-election to the Board. They are the only WEC members seeking election to the Board this year.

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 at no cost to WEC members, will be held at the Canadian Club on Route 14 in Barre Town. Reservations are required for dinner, but not for the meeting itself. A registration coupon can be found on page 8 of this issue of Co-op Currents, and will be included in the next (April) issue, as well. The date of the 77th Annual Washington Electric Cooperative Membership Meeting is Tuesday, May 3. A schedule of events will appear in the April issue, which is the official Annual Meeting issue of Co-op Currents.

Voters who choose to do so may 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 statements 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 issue 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.

### Barry Bernstein

**Residence:** I live on Bliss Road in East Calais, and have owned a home there since 1976. I have been an owner-member of WEC for 45 years, since 1971. WEC members should feel free to call me at 456-8843 or e-mail me at bbearvt@myfairpoint.net, if they have any questions.

**Education:** I graduated from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, with a B.S. in Government and a minor in Business Administration. I attended Northwestern University, Graduate School of Business, Chicago, Illinois.

**Profession:** Co-owner, Better World Energy LLC., the Northeast representative for Messersmith Mfg. Inc., a leading manufacturer of automated woodchip heating plants for schools, institutions, and commercial/industrial use. Prior to starting our business I was in management and consulting for profit and nonprofit organizations.

**Community Involvement/WEC:** I have served on the WEC Board of Directors since 1997 and have been the president of the Board since November 1998. I also serve on the Board of IRL Inc., Northampton, Massachusetts, a disability-rights organization specializing in ADA technical assistance and training. I have served on: the Board and Finance Committee of Woodbury College, Montpelier; the Board and as Treasurer of the Hunger Mountain Co-op, Montpelier, and the Buffalo Mountain Co-op, Hardwick. I was one of the early members, part-time staff, and on the Board of the Plainfield Co-op. I was a co-founder of the Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL), Montpelier, and served as its executive director (1978 –1982, 1992-1993). I was a co-ordinator, and served on the Board and as an officer of the former CVTA (now called Green Mountain Transportation Agency), a non-profit organization providing transportation services to central Vermont elders, people with disabilities, and others in northern Vermont.

### Roy Folsom

**Residence:** I am the owner/operator of Crooked Brooks Farm LLC, on US Route 2 in Cabot, where I have lived since 1985.

**Education/Profession:** I graduated from high school in 1970, in Solon, Ohio. I attended Kent State University for one year, then formed a construction company with my brother. In 1974 I moved to Vermont. Two years ago the hard physical work of dairy farming took its toll on me, requiring a double knee replacement. As much as I didn’t want to, I had to give up being a dairy farmer. Our farm continues, but raises dairy replacement heifers and grows high-quality haylage for a neighboring dairy farm and sells dry hay to other farms. Since 2006, I also have been an Elite Farm Certified Agent for Nationwide Agribusiness Insurance. I use my over 35 years of farming experience to help farmers develop insurance policies that are affordable, yet give maximum protection of their farm assets.

**Community Service/WEC:** I served on the Cabot Planning Commission, 1991-1996. From 1992 to 2011 I was a member of the Cabot Zoning Board of Adjustment, being chairman for 11 years. I am a member of the Washington County Farm Bureau, and have served as president, and I am currently vice-president. I was appointed to the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board by Governor Douglas in 2005, and am currently the longest-serving farmer on the Board. I was elected to the WEC Board of Directors in 2004, I have served WEC on the Members & Markets Committee, and presently serve on the Policy Committee and as chairman of the Power and Operations Committee.

### Annie Reed

**Residence:** I have lived in Marshfield for 40 years. I have been a member of the Washington Electric Co-op since 2000. You can contact me by mail at 3941 Holister Hill, Marshfield, 05658, by phone at 454-1324, or by e-mail at annereed48@gmail.com.

**Education/Profession:** I graduated from Beloit College in 1970 with a B.A. in Anthropology, and in 1997 I received a Master of Science degree in Environmental Studies with a Concentration in Conservation Biology from Antioch University New England. Since 1996 I have been a freelance ecologist. For the past 18 years I have been teaching hands-on courses in college science, most recently at the Community College of Vermont in Montpelier and St. Johnsbury. A selection of the courses I have taught includes: Introduction to Environmental Science, Wildlife Ecology, Wetlands Ecology, Fundamentals of Earth Science, and The Natural History of Vermont. This summer I will be teaching Forest Ecology.

**Community Service/WEC:** I am currently Chair of the Marshfield Conservation Commission, a former member of the Marshfield Planning Commission, former President of the Friends of the Jaquith Public Library, and am now serving on the Jaquish Board of Trustees. For three years I served on the Goddard College Board of Trustees. I am former Chair and current member of the Advisory Group on Vascular Plants for the Vermont Endangered Species Committee.

For nine years I volunteered as an Emergency Medical Technician with the Cabot Ambulance and the Plainfield Fire & Rescue Squad. I am a member of two food co-ops and the NorthCountry Federal Credit Union.

Six years ago I was elected to the WEC Board of Directors and have had a steep learning curve, trying to bring myself up to a level where I can begin to understand the scope of relationships our Co-op manages. I was appointed Secretary after the death of Marline Milne; I am a member of the Members & Markets Committee, the Editorial Committee, and the Policy Committee.

I continue to be impressed with our Co-op. We have a dedicated and safety-conscious staff. We continue to improve service reliability in some of Vermont’s most challenging and sparsely populated terrain. We have an engaged and committed Board. We are one of only two utilities in Vermont to have achieved a 100-percent renewable power supply, allowing WEC to design our own net metered generation program with the intention of ensuring that members contribute equitably to the costs of basic operation and administration. The Public Service Board’s draft net-metering rule for 2017 includes provisions for equity and fairness very much like the ones we are now using. I feel proud that we are on the cutting edge of future legislation that will bring Vermont closer to energy self-sufficiency and responsible environmental and financial stewardship. I love our Co-op! ❍
Mobile Homes
continued from page 1

called for some kind of corrective action. A coalition formed, called the Modular Housing Innovation Project, bringing together the technical and financial expertise and resources of the philanthropic sector (High Meadows), an array of housing and conservation organizations, and a still-expanding network of supportive agencies.

“One thing we agreed on is that it doesn’t make sense to replace manufactured homes with new manufactured homes,” says Schneider, of EVT. “These homes are constructed to meet a HUD (U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development) code. The current code is more than 29 years old and doesn’t come close to the bare-minimum code for stick-built homes.”

“We don’t have any oversight of the HUD code,” he adds. “As a result, homes come into Vermont that are designed for a very different climate. We are in the same HUD region as Virginia, for example, and that’s reflected in their requirements concerning durability, energy costs, indoor air quality, and comfort. But in Vermont, we keep our homes for six months of the year; the HUD code doesn’t come close to creating a healthy indoor climate for a manufactured home situated here.”

So the conversation turned to the possibility of creating not just a better, but a truly high-quality alternative. The need is growing daily. Schneider says the life expectancy for a traditional mobile home is about 30 years, and in Vermont almost 75 percent of the 22,000 or so that are in use are approaching or have passed that age. But if they’re to be replaced, what will their replacement look like? The coalition agreed that their goal must be to develop a modular unit – meaning a house that could be transported to the site intact – that would conform to the footprint of the former mobile home, whether that’s in a mobile home park or on private land, but provide better value, a better quality of life for the owners, lower operational and maintenance costs, and long-term durability.

Accompanying these structural and design challenges, however, was another one, equally important and perhaps harder to achieve: making them affordable for customers in the mobile home market.

That product now exists. It’s called the VERMOD, and it’s manufactured in Wilder, Vermont, by a builder named Steve Davis who has lots of experience collaborating with Efficiency Vermont on affordable, high-performance residential homes. (Davis was EVT’s Partner of the Year in 2012.) Davis started the new operation in 2011, to build homes for the residents, energy efficiency experts, and people interested in developing a market for net-zero, affordable housing.

Certainly, he points out, the need is there. The VERMOD

The VERMOD home has the dimensions and the basic appearance, of traditional mobile homes (manufactured housing), but it has more in common with new, net-zero homes that are being built for the modern residential market. Net-zero is a term used for homes that are equipped to generate the power that their residents use, consuming zero fossil fuels and creating zero emissions. Achieving this requires a power-generating system; for the VERMOD, it’s solar panels. But the key to retaining and maximizing the benefit of the energy produced is the home’s airtight construction.

“It has twice the levels of insulation of a new manufactured home,” says EVT’s Peter Schneider. This includes the floor, a vulnerable area for traditional mobile homes. For the VERMOD, it’s insulated to R-40, and the home is placed on a frost-protected foundation or frost-protected piers; either one creates a crawl space and a more secure footing than the conventional mobile home. It doesn’t have wheels, like a mobile home; it arrives on a flatbed truck and is lowered into place by a crane.

Each home is sealed with advanced building techniques and tested for air leaks. Large, triple-glaze windows let in lots of light but hold fast against air infiltration. A building this tight needs mechanical ventilation to maintain a healthy indoor environment. The VERMOD’s system continuously monitors the levels of unwanted gases, such as carbon dioxide and emissions from cleaning products and other sources, and activates the air-exchange system to expel them and bring a matching quantity of fresh air from outdoors. Construction materials are selected to virtually eliminate “off-gassing,” a problem that plagues manufactured housing and is associated with symptoms of asthma, as well as dizziness and nausea.

“That means on day one we’re delivering a healthy home,” says Schneider. “That’s a critical piece. I’m with Efficiency Vermont, and we’re always coming from a place of advocating for energy efficiency. But without good comfort and a healthy building for the residents, energy savings aren’t worth anything. That’s what this effort is all about.”

The heating system is a cold-climate air-source heat pump (ASHP), While for many people, heat pumps in Vermont are suspect because they become less efficacious at very cold temperatures (therefore necessitating a backup heating system like oil or gas), net-zero homes are so tightly constructed that they retain their heat, even to the point that human energy and exhalation can raise the temperature. In such a home, the ASHP system performs well. Plus, these aren’t rambling farmhouses; they’re compact units, typically of about 1,050 square feet.

Options are available in terms of the interior design (numbers of baths and bedrooms, for example), and units can be matched and offset to create more living space. They can even be stacked to create a two-story home.

A WEC perspective

Change to the status quo for mobile homes in Vermont, particularly in Washington Electric Cooperative’s service territory, can’t come soon enough for WEC Director of Products & Services Bill Powell. He’s tired of seeing their owners struggling to pay their electric bills. The HUD code that controls manufactured-home construction represents, in Powell’s estimation, not a mandate for structural quality, but “the worst building standards that you can legally get away with.”

“The energy costs really can be
Tackling Costs: The Mobile-Home Replacement Project Finds Ways to Innovate

When Gaye Symington, of the High Meadows Fund, first brought experts in housing together with energy specialists, the idea was to lower the purchase price to make VERMODs affordable for people with modest incomes.

The Project has scattered 31 VERMODs in mobile home parks around the state in hopes of attracting the interest of other residents. Schneider says that in some locations it has worked. At the Shelburnenwoods Mobile Home Park in Shelburne, which is a cooperative owned by its residents, the demonstration model and financing incentives have led to three purchases, and at a park in Addison County, he says, two homeowners have made the move.

Also encouraging is that the two VERMODs that have already been sold by their owners brought the same price that the original buyers had paid for them. It's a small sample size, and the units were still pretty new, but a traditional mobile home would have lost value even in that short time. By contrast, retaining value is one of four factors Peltier hopes will be persuasive to potential buyers.

"The first," he says, "is that the energy efficiency is unbelievable! Second is the comfort, quality, and health benefits of these homes. Third is the ease of maintenance, and not facing the headaches that inevitably come with having a deteriorating structure. And fourth is the long-term asset value. We realize that that's something manufactured-home owners aren't used to thinking about -- that in year 20 they'll have an asset that has held its value. But it's a major reason why we undertook this, even though we know it's a heavy lift to get people to bite on these."

A high-quality, high-performance home can change people's lives, and in the Modular Housing Innovation Project, Powell is hoping that some WEC members will decide they feel that way, too. The manufacturer’s ability to adjust the design to match existing footprints for various mobile home configurations should be another selling point.

"We have this market that's made up of dispersed individual units on private property," says Powell. "We also serve several mobile home parks, including at least one nonprofit run by a housing trust."

Thus far, none of the 31 VERMODs that the Modular Housing Innovation Project has set up as demonstration models are in WEC's service territory. Powell hopes that will change, and so does Schneider. It will require coming to an agreement with a mobile home park that has a site available and an interest in hosting a VERMOD.

"Bill's thinking is in line with what we're doing here," says Schneider. "We'd love to get a toehold in the Washington Electric market. We're offering something we wholeheartedly believe in."
2015 Community Fund Report
With No Third-Party Fees, Your Donations Go Further

Shortly before Washington Electric Cooperative’s General Manager, Patty Richards, filed her yearly report to WEC’s Board of Directors on the activity of the Co-op’s Community Fund during 2015, an article in the online news site VT Digger discussed a report by Vermont Attorney General Bill Sorrell. It concerned fees that are collected by organizations providing fundraising services to many popular charities.

The differences between the AG’s report and Richards’ Community Fund report couldn’t have been more stark. It would not be accurate nor fair to the many excellent charities that Vermonters support to imply that they all divert a high percentage of people’s donations to the overhead costs of fundraising. But in some cases, they do. And according to Sorrell’s findings, the cumulative impact is significant — some might say alarming.

“In the past three years,” the VT Digger article said “Vermonters have given more than $7.8 million to charity through fundraisers contracted to solicit donations — but less than a third of that sum was actually received by the charities.” Which means that two-thirds of the money generously donated did not benefit the causes that the Vermont donors intended to support.

The amounts retained by third-party fundraisers varied greatly, but some reached into the 90-percent range — and that’s on top of the pay the fundraising companies receive for designing and conducting the charity drive. Sorrell’s report noted that the fee impact was lower for in-state charity drives. That provides some solace, but certainly many favorite causes for Vermonters are national and international in scope. Sorrell said he was not trying to dampen Vermonters’ charitable instincts (his report came out during the “giving season;” between Thanksgiving and New Year); his advice was that people ask telephone solicitors whether they’re working for a fundraising organization rather than the charity itself (they are required to answer that question); he also suggested that people might wish to circumvent the paid solicitors by finding ways to contribute directly to the cause they want to support.

(Sorrell’s report was covered in VT Digger on December 6, 2015.) That brings us back to WEC’s Community Fund. Some weeks later General Manager Richards made her yearly report to the WEC Board. It’s a retrospective of the previous year, summarizing the amounts distributed to the local groups and activities that successfully applied for contributions from the Community Fund, with a list of who they were, the total amount given out by the fund in 2015, how much money the fund had on hand for its activities in 2016, and any other pertinent details.

Here’s what’s not reported to the board: fees and overhead costs for the Community Fund. That’s because there aren’t any. Every cent contributed by Washington Electric Co-op members and former members goes to the

continued on page 7

Services For Families
At A Critical Time
Good Beginnings Expo to Celebrate 25 Years

Charitable and social service organizations, in central Vermont and everywhere, often do good works by supporting people whom many refer to as “undeserved.” Good Beginnings of Central Vermont (GBCV) does that, too, and an important part of its underserved target population can escape the notice of social service agencies and society as a whole.

“If you’ve had a child, you know,” says Ana Campanile, who has had two. Ana — a Washington Electric Cooperative member from Middlesex — is GBCV’s program director. Hers is one of three part-time staff positions for the small organization whose cozy “Next,” as they call it, is on River Street in Montpelier. “The way our society is set up,” she continues, “a lot of emphasis and importance is put on pregnancy. And then, birth is action-packed!”

“But the postpartum period is often very neglected. No matter how well-resourced a person may be, being a new mother postpartum can be a lonely and isolated and very difficult time.”

The challenges can be even greater, of course, for women who are not well-resourced — who survive on small incomes, who don’t have cars and may not have access to public transportation, who receive little family support, or face other challenges.

Working with women and prospective parents from all strata of society, Good Beginnings does, in fact, start at the beginning. GBCV offers classes that are grouped, like pregnancy itself, into three trimesters. Trimester One offers guidance on prenatal fitness and diet, breastfeeding, and a session called “Becoming a Father.” Trimester Two is birth preparation (childbirth classes, advice on pain-coping practices, the psychology of labor), and Trimester Three, called “Postpartum Foundations,” focuses on birth healing, infant care and feeding, and other subjects. The classes are free and open to all. In addition to its own well-informed and experienced staff, GBCV taps expert resources, including the state Health Department and the Central Vermont Breastfeeding Coalition. (A schedule of the class sessions for the three trimesters can be found at http://www.goodbeginningscentralvt.org.)

However, GBCV’s long-term commitment to mothers, their infants, and their families is best expressed by what comes next — the services it provides following a baby’s birth. Postpartum — the first days, weeks, and months after a newborn has arrived and upended a family’s routines, sleep patterns, relationships, and dynamics — can bring on a very serious form of depression for the mother. It can also bring on feelings of disorientation and helplessness for fathers and prior children. No matter how welcome and loved the baby, this is very commonly a stressful, challenging time of transition even in the absence of clinical postpartum depression.

In Good Beginnings’ 2014-2015 annual report, then-executive director Alison Lamagna movingly described the world as mothers frequently experience it when, for almost everyone else, life has returned to normal.

“Her partner is back to work,” Alison wrote, “household duties have gone by the wayside, breastfeeding is challenging and she is worried the baby isn’t getting enough, she is alone much of the day, she couldn’t get the baby to settle down, she needs childcare resources for when she returns to work in a couple of months, and she hasn’t showered in days.”

We have a societal vision of young families with newborns — whether the first child or the fifth — as the embodiment of health, continued on page 8

To call the Co-op, dial 223-5245 Mon - Thur 7:30 am – 5 pm and Fri 7:30 am – 4 pm.; toll-free for reporting outages & emergencies, 1-800-WEC-5245.
causes that the Community Fund Committee elects to support. No one is hired to run the program; requests for donations are fielded by the general manager and the committee—consisting of WEC Board members Barry Bernstein, Richard Rubin, and Mary Just Skinner—and the general manager makes decisions regarding donations. There have been no advertising expenses since shortly after the fund was established in 2002 because they are not needed, what with the Co-op’s name, strength, and familiarity with the Community Fund, suffice to get the word out.

As for who receives donations—the list of 2015 recipients appears on page 8. Applicants approved for grants are ones the committee believes most WEC members would endorse; mostly they are comparatively small, local nonprofits that not only do good work but (importantly) are financially stable and supported within the community. “It’s our members’ and former members’ donated money,” Richards explains. “These funds are, in a way, investments, and we want them to go to organizations that will survive and be effective.”

The fund does not contribute to groups furthering a religious or political agenda. Nor does it donate to foreign national organizations, since they have their own means for fundraising and WEC’s purpose is to support local charitable efforts.

Washington Electric’s Community Fund is capitalized primarily by current and former members’ capital credit refunds which they have authorized the Co-op to divert to this cause. Capital credits are each member’s allocated share of the “margins” that WEC earns in years when its revenues exceed its expenditures; WEC keeps track of this obligation to its members in the form of bookkeeping entries, and a portion of these credits gets applied as a refund toward members’ November’s electric bills. (For former members, the refunds accumulate until they reach a threshold, at which time WEC sends a check if their addresses are known.) However, people can choose to contribute that money to the Community Fund instead.

For most people, these are small amounts, in the neighborhood of $15 to $25. Yet added to similar contributions from other Co-op members, they provide enough capital to enable the Community Fund to make a meaningful contribution each year to our quality of life here in central Vermont, and to help relieve the burdens of people who are in need.

To the numbers!

In 2015, a total of 56 organizations received donations from the Community Fund. Those donations totaled $22,713. By comparison, in 2014 gifts were extended to 64 recipients (this was a record for the now 14-year-old program), totaling $21,159. Most organizations received donations between $100 and $500; a relatively small number received more than that, and a handful of recipients who serve a high volume of Vermonters with critical services such as health care and remedial education got grants of $1,000 or more.

In the latter months of 2015 WEC members re-seeded the Community Fund with $27,703 from their capital credits, up significantly from the $21,969 the fund received in 2014. The fund carried over approximately $835 in unspent money from 2015, so it started off the new year with $28,538.

Supporting Stuff-A-Truck and local military families in need have been causes of great importance to a number of Co-op employees, directors, and vendors. They have made special annual donations to the Community Fund, earmarked for the Adopt-a-Family program and for gifts for children and dinners for needy military families during the holiday season. These folks were generous again in 2015, giving $2,635 to the cause.

The box at the beginning of this article explains how members can add their capital credit returns to those of fellow WEC members who already support the Community Fund. All are enthusiastically encouraged to do so.

### Batteries

sell “primary batteries” (defined as “non-rechargeable batteries weighing two kilograms – 4.4 lbs. – or less, including alkaline, carbon-zinc, and lithium metal batteries”) unless they participate in an approved stewardship plan that provides free collection and recycling.

What it means is that those batteries—including rechargeable batteries people may wish to get rid of—now can be recycled at no cost, and the state Agency of Natural Resources, working with a national organization named Call2Recycle, has set up a system making it convenient for people to do so. It provides more than 100 disposal locations; many of them are retail outlets, like hardware stores and pharmacy chains, that sell these household batteries.

Washington Electric Cooperative is adding one more location to that list—WEC’s office building in East Montpelier.

“We want to make battery-recycling as easy for people as we can,” said General Manager Patty Richards. “We’re well-acquainted with the Coventry landfill—which is the state’s only active commercial landfill—because our electric generating plant that’s fueled by landfill methane is located there. These batteries, and the compounds and metals they contain, shouldn’t be going up there with the rest of the household trash.”

Richards tips her cap, figuratively speaking, to Mike Gray, one of WEC’s system maintenance technicians. Mike took it on his own to establish collection boxes in various places at the Co-op’s office building and the warehouse/garage, where employees can recycle the batteries used up in the workplace. They are also welcome—indeed, encouraged—to bring their used batteries from home and dispose of them at these collection boxes.

That’s what led to the next step: inviting WEC members to use them, too.

“Why not?” said Richards. “We’re a co-op, owned by the people we serve. Let’s invite our members to drop their old batteries off with us if that makes it more convenient for them to recycle. All folks need to do is bring them in the door and leave them with us. We’ll take it from there. There’s no cost to the Co-op for doing this; we’re merely acting voluntarily as a collection site.

#### A step toward stewardship

“Product stewardship” is a catch that many have argued will, in the long run, be one of the most effective means for seriously reducing the waste stream. Under product stewardship, a company’s relationship to its products does not end when the customer purchases them and carries them out the door—which essentially foists responsibility for the environmental impact of broken, discarded products on society and government. Product stewardship envisions the company reclaiming those products, a responsibility that provides an incentive for them to use materials they can recycle and reuse for the next generation of goods they produce. The practice has a longer track record in other countries, such as in Europe.

Vermont’s Act 139 pertains to 80 different brands of batteries. According to the organization Call2Recycle, more than 650,000 pounds of batteries were sold in Vermont last year, and 94 percent of those went into the waste stream instead of a recycling program. Act 139, and the businesses that have signed up to accept these discarded batteries, aim to change those numbers radically.

Not all batteries are covered. Call2Recycle has published a list that includes industrial batteries and batteries used in devices that employ cathode ray tubes (such as old TVs and computer monitors) among a small number of exemptions. More information on the entire Vermont battery-recycling program, including locations where old batteries can be safely disposed of, is available at www.Call2Recycle.org/participating-producers-vermont/.

No more icy feeling from throwing out these things that we know have no business going in the trash. There are convenient ways to get rid of them without damaging the environment, and if your best alternative is to leave them off with Washington Electric Co-op, we will gladly take them off your hands.
To call the Co-op, dial 223-5245 Mon - Thur 7:30 am – 5 pm and Fri 7:30 am – 4 pm.; toll-free for reporting outages & emergencies, 1-800-WEC-5245.

A good fit for the Community Fund

GBCV is, and has been, a recipient of annual donations by Washington Electric Cooperative’s Community Fund in recent years. In 2015 WEC contributed a total of $22,713 to 56 local organizations to help them continue their good works in central Vermont. Good Beginnings serves families in 24 Washington County towns, and also extends into western Orange County.

(There, it overlaps a little with a separate organization, Good Beginnings of the Upper Valley, which is based in West Lebanon, New Hampshire. “Our chapter was inspired by their chapter, twenty-five years ago,” says GBCV’s Ana Campanile.)

GBCV will celebrate that anniversary on Saturday, April 9, at its annual Baby & Child Expo, which is the specific event that WEC’s Community Fund donation helps make possible each year. The Expo, scheduled from 9 a.m. to noon at the Berlin Elementary School, will be a rollicking affair with entertainment; health, nutrition and parenting workshops; a baby fashion show; and 40-some vendors in attendance.

The 2016 Baby & Child Expo will celebrate GBCV’s quarter-century of service with the theme, “Happy Birthday!” – a title with two meanings, because it also reflects the group’s goal of helping every baby’s birth be a joyous day followed by a happy and successful postpartum period for its mama and family.

People-to-people connections

“Volunteers are the heart and soul” of Good Beginnings, says Ana Campanile. There are about 50 active volunteers in Washington County. Many, but far from all of them, are retired, and while they are all women GBCV defines making a conscious effort to include men. By recruiting, training, and working with these volunteers, Ana says, “I feel like I get to meet the very best and nicest people central Vermont has to offer. They are the most passionate, generous, and giving people.”

Ana talks about the “baby bubble.” “People enjoy having babies in their lives,” she explains, “but then they get out of that bubble and it’s like ‘Where did all the babies go?’ They want to be able to help.”

Volunteers must provide references and go through a criminal background check. This is followed by a two-hour orientation. Volunteers – also called “visitors” – attend six additional trainings each year. They visit their assigned families every week or two or three or four months, staying with them for two to three hours. There are many ways to be helpful: playing with older children, tending the baby so the mother gets a chance to rest or bathe, accompanying her on a shopping trip, helping her find resources she needs, or simply visiting and talking.

“The objective is to form a triad,” Ana explains: “The mother, the baby, and the volunteer.”

Volunteers can get more in-depth training in order to work in particularly stressful, complex situations, like a prolonged hospital stay for premature babies or those with medical issues including “infant addiction.” GBCV also provides an advanced level of training for volunteers who want to become “vulnerable families visitors.”

“Vulnerable families,” the website explains, “are those experiencing poverty, food insecurity, mental illness, substance abuse, disability or other issues. Volunteers . . . will have a special interest in helping those with the greatest barriers reach their fullest potential. Visitors will receive ongoing support from GBCV staff and the opportunity to shadow-visit with the Assistant Director prior to visiting independently.”

“About 60 percent of our families are low-income,” says Ana. “That’s a fairly large percentage, but we open it to everyone because of the principle that everyone needs help during the postpartum period.”

In 2014-2015, according to its annual report, Good Beginnings of Central Vermont served 139 area families (140 children), with 1,776 hours of in-home support. This doesn’t count visits to “the Nest” on River Street. As well as providing administrative space for Good Beginnings, the Nest is a gathering place (with baby toys, and also toy babies that parents practice with ahead of time). Women frequently drop in with their newborns and toddlers to socialize, perhaps to nurse their infants together, to have coffee and tea, keep appointments with volunteers and staff, borrow from the small library of baby books and parenting guides, and just relax.

Even a short visit to the Nest reveals that, like the rest of GBCV’s services, it brings smiles to these women’s faces. In a day frequently dominated by the needs of someone who weighs ten or fifteen pounds, those smiles are well-earned. And that’s a good investment for Washington Electric Co-op and those members (and former members) who restock the Community Fund from their capital credits each year so it can continue to foster good beginnings for the mothers and families in our part of Vermont.

DINNER RESERVATION

WEC’S 77th Annual Meeting • May 3, 2016

Your Choice of One Entrée:

A. Baked Ham
B. Baked Stuffed Chicken Breast
C. Steak
D. Vegetarian Quiche

Please indicate your meal choice: A B C D Member Guest Child/Age

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Cost: Free for reservations made on or before 4/22. Walk-in on 5/3: $15 per adult, $8 per child (10 – 16). Children under 10 free. (Please do not return in ballot envelope.)

2015 Community Fund Donations

- Adopt-A-Family
- Barre Heritage Festival
- Blue Mountain Union School Spanish Club
- Cabot Connects
- Capstone Community Action
- Central VT ADULT Basic Education
- Central VT Council on Aging
- Central VT Home Health & Hospice
- Champlain Valley Exposition-Vt Agricultural Hall of Fame
- Chelsea Public Library
- Community Capital of Vermont
- CVMC - Palliative Care Donation
- Donations Towards Stuff A Truck and Adopt A Family
- Dragonheart Vermont
- (Dragon Boat Race)
- Faith In Action Northern Community First Branch Ambulance
- Food Boxes (20)
- Fourth Grade Foresters
- Friends of the Mad River
- Good Samaritan Haven
- Governor’s Institute of Vermont
- Green Mountain Council Boy Scouts of America
- Green Mountain United Way
- Green Up Vermont
- Groton Community Club — Fall Chicken Pie Supper
- Home Share NOW
- Jaquith Public Library
- Kellogg-Hubbard Library
- Mad River Valley Rotary Club
- Montpelier Alive
- Montpelier High School Project Graduation
- Montpelier Senior Activity Center
- NFI, Vermont Inc.
- North Branch Nature Center
- People’s Health & Wellness Clinic
- Plainfield Historical Society
- Prevent Child Abuse
- Roxbury Free Library
- Rumney Memorial School
- Spaulding High School Project Graduation
- Studio Place Arts
- Stuff-A-Truck
- The Green Mountain Film Festival
- Topham Historical Society
- Toy Joy
- Twinfield Together Mentoring Program
- VT Center For Independent Living
- VT Food Bank
- VT Historical Society
- VT Horse Assisted Therapy
- VT Youth Conservation Corps
- Youth Service Bureau

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