The experience of arriving at work has changed for the better for Washington Electric Cooperative’s linemen, technicians, and other members of the staff who work out of the Co-op’s warehouse/garage on Fassett Road in East Montpelier. What has long been a drab and purely utilitarian cement-block building – a place to house and service the Co-op’s trucks and off-road vehicles and to store the vast amounts of electrical equipment for the lines and substations, with an unadorned conference room and a few small offices thrown in – still fits that ho-hum description.

But something has changed on the outside. The gable end that faces the roadway has become a canvas, of sorts, for a colorful, full-length mural painted this summer by Woodbury artist Ethan Fielder. The mural depicts Vermont’s countryside in all its glorious seasons, with images of hills and lakes, steeples and barns, renewable energy installations (wind turbines on a distant hilltop, a field with solar panels), and winding country roads dotted with power poles and the wires that sag gracefully between them. WEC’s red PistenBully – a multipurpose off-road track vehicle – navigates through a snowy field in winter, leaving its parallel tread marks behind it; the curved blades of a derrick-driven steel drill bore into the brown earth, making a hole where a new pole will be set.

Foremost in the scene is the large figure of a line worker, with helmet and reflector vest, leaning from a lift bucket high in the air with tools in hand, servicing the electric-distribution system that WEC’s rural members rely on.

“It tells the story of our work, and the seasonal transitions. I think it will be kind of uplifting, when our people are working long, cold hours in the wintertime, to provide a reminder that, just over the horizon, the summer is coming.”

Dan Weston

Woodbury artist Ethan Fielder (left) says he hates seeing a blank wall. With financial contributions from allies in the local energy industry, WEC was able to hire Ethan to transform its warehouse wall on Fassett Road.

In all its detail and diversity, the mural announces to all who see it: “Here is the work we do. Here, in rural Vermont, is where we do it. And this is our home.”

“The picture is meant to look like the landscape that we serve, the vastness of it, and that our crews are out there day and night,” says WEC General Manager Patty Richards, who, like most of the office staff (and some of the Operations staff, as well), works out of the administration building in the village a mile away.

“You drive up there and see that mural and, wow, it jumps out at you! It’s a really nice way to show our Co-op employees how much we value and care about the work they do. The mural celebrates and embraces our employees’ work and it’s there to remind them every day that what they do is essential to how we live, and that it’s an integral part of our beautiful Vermont landscape.”

WEC’s Engineering & Operations Director Dan Weston gets a fresh look at the mural first thing every morning when he drives over from}_{continued on page 7}
On Net Metering Rates, And the Next Generation

Net Meters: Note: New PSB Rules Affect Every Project

By Barry Bernstein

The days are getting shorter, the nights longer, and the leaves are taking on color, but what a beautiful summer we have had. We could have used more rain and a few less humid days, but having just come back from a 10-day trip to the Midwest I can attest that we are very, very lucky compared to other parts of the country. Most of the U.S., including the Northeast, has experienced extreme heat and drought. July and August brought some severe storm damage to the WEC territory, taking down lines and poles and cutting power to members, often on weekends. Trees from outside our right-of-way fell on the power lines and in some areas snapped poles. We had several weekend storms that not only required WEC staff to work, but we also had to reach out for help from neighboring utilities.

Heartfelt thanks to all the line workers, right-of-way contract crews who spent many hours clearing downed trees and debris, and WEC staff for their diligence and tireless efforts.

I know it was also difficult for many of our members who were without power for periods during those weekends, so thank you for your patience and understanding. Mother Nature does have the ultimate last word.

Net Metering
The Vermont Public Service Board (PSB) has issued its final order on net metering. The Board’s order noted that the existing rules provided “powerful economic incentives to participate” in net metering. The PSB also noted that the “current pace of net metering programs needs to be moderated so as to be sustainable in the long term and to mitigate associated rate impacts.”

The Board’s new rule is designed to (1) reduce cost to ratepayers; (2) moderate the pace of development to a rate that is more sustainable; and 3) reduce environmental impacts. We will create a new program to comply with the PSB’s new rules, and this program will go into effect January 1, 2017.

The Public Service Board’s new rules call for a lower amount to be paid as credits for the excess power provided by net-metered systems to the grid, and rescinding people’s ability to entirely zero out an electric bill. The Board pointedly noted that the rate of new installations under the current rules was too fast, calling that pace “explosive.” The Board intentionally designed the new rules to slow the pace of new net metering installations, and to make the program fairer for all consumers.

The new rules will also affect pre-existing net metered installations — those in operation before January 1, 2017. It will require all pre-existing systems, after 10 years of operation, to pay non-bypassable charges such as the monthly member charge and the energy efficiency charge. Also, the rate paid for excess generation after 10 years for pre-existing systems will be set at a blended residential rate, which is estimated to be about 15 cents/kWh. All Vermont utilities, including WEC, will be required to file a new net metering tariff with the PSB by October 15. Our new program will then be vetted and reviewed by regulators to assure we meet the new rules set forth by the PSB. Hence, changes in net metering will be coming with the turn of the new year that will affect everyone with net metered systems.

NRECA
Our General Manager, Patty Richards and I attended the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) regional meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan, shortly after Labor Day. The meeting attracted almost 1,000 people representing co-ops from Regions 1 and 4 — as far south as the North Carolina, west to Indiana, and north to Maine.

NRECA, which represents nearly 1,000 electric and phone cooperatives, uses these regional meetings as part of its process for adopting policies and resolutions that give guidance and direction to its efforts to influence Congress and for working collaboratively with other organizations throughout the U.S. Although WEC does not always agree with some of the final resolutions, we do engage in the NRECA’s annual meeting, which takes place each February, so it does provide us with a voice nationally on many issues facing electric co-ops.

At the regional meeting, WEC suggested changes to resolutions regarding distributed generation, to remind our NRECA staff that co-ops are consumer-centric and we work to support distributed generation and technologies that help control the use of electricity. Our changes were approved in both regions 1 and 4, and will now go on to the next regional meeting before being voted on by all co-ops in February.

One very invigorating workshop Patty and I attended addressed the issue of how co-ops relate to the new generation of Millennials and Gen X members who are joining our co-ops both as staff and as members. It focused on how folks born in the mid-1940s and earlier, the Baby Boomers that followed them, and these younger generations communicate, and how they approach life, work, and problem-solving. In some ways the generations are quite different, but in others they are similar. The key is to understand those differences.

We seek to continually evolve and improve our services. That often calls for different ways of looking at what we do and how we do it. The Millennials and generations to follow will help us reach and aspire to new ways of serving our members and improving the services we provide. Transitions are inevitable, and always interesting.

Have a great fall, everyone.
WEC’s New Member Services Representative

A Sociable Fellow for a Job Calling for People Skills

Gordon Matheson, Washington Electric Cooperative’s newest member services representative (MSR) is a guy with an attitude. But his is the good kind.

What you want in an MSR is someone who's friendly, who sincerely wants to help people—whether it's with a simple transaction like paying their power bill or responding to a complaint or concern, who is willing to shoulder responsibilities to work through to the end of the problem, and who likes learning new things to expand his proficiency.

This describes Gordon to a T. And though it should describe anyone in a service position with a company or organization, these traits are even more important at an electric co-op. That's because: 1) the members who call or come in are the owners of the company and should be accorded the appropriate respect; and 2) WEC is in the business of providing their electricity, which in the modern world is right up there near food and shelter as a basic need. When electric service is interrupted callers might be anxious or in difficult circumstances, and they need and deserve every bit of understanding and information that a member services rep can provide.

MSRs represent the Co-op, so hiring for these positions is important.

"We liked Gordon right away when he inquired about the job and came for an interview," says WEC Member Services Supervisor Susan Golden. "He’s outgoing and courteous, and he’s bright and has a good background in customer service. He’s been a great fit for us in our group here at the Co-op."

At 27, Gordon Matheson is a local fellow who grew up mostly in Riverton, graduated from U-32 High School in 2007, and became a father just a year ago. He and his wife, Desiree, celebrated Mila’s first birthday, on August 31, by moving into a home they had purchased in Northfield, so it’s been an exciting time of transition and growth for the young family, with Gordon having been hired at WEC just this past April. Gordon took Dawn Johnson’s prominent spot, front and center at the member services counter, where he is the first to greet people arriving at WEC's office building in East Montpelier. (Dawn was tapped to succeed Debbie Brown, who retired in March as WEC’s Administrative Assistant.)

Gordon came to Washington Electric after five years at the Comfort Inn and Suites, in Berlin. During his first two years there he worked at the front desk, but he also rose at 2 a.m. on snowy mornings to plow office driveways and parking lots for his employer, who owned several other properties in the area. Reflecting his personable approach, he says that much of what he enjoyed about the hotel job was the relationships he developed with customers, particularly "regulars" staying at the Comfort Inn on business or tourism expeditions.

"It’s cool, the bonds you build with certain people by knowing their habits, and what coffee they like, and whether they want extra blankets in their rooms," he says.

Gordon sees the same kind of thing happening at WEC. “Like Elaine (Goner, also a WEC member services rep) has her regulars,” he says, “who go right up to her when they come in the building.”

In 2013, Gordon was promoted to the managerial position at the hotel desk, and in that capacity he worked closely with the general manager. “It gave me experience handling crises,” he says, “and that can apply to this position with Washington Electric.” Except that in the private commercial sector, such as a hotel, he adds, you sometimes have to play your cards close to your chest. "Here (at WEC) we share all the information we have to assist people, and do our best to explain all the options people have. That’s awesome.”

That openness, and eagerness to assist people in difficult situations, comes into play in a responsibility Gordon has taken on for the Co-op, making the late-afternoon calls to members who have fallen behind on their electric bills to the point that they’re at risk of disconnection.

"Those are tough conversations to have," he says. "The main thing is for us to work with people, to try to help them avoid disconnection. It can be an issue of how far we can go in extending a payment schedule."

Other life experiences important to Gordon include the nine months he and Desiree spent in Oregon, which is her home state. He attended a community college in the Portland area, living in Oregon "was a culture shock," he admits. "But I got to see wild horses in the central part of the state, and tumble weeds and Indian reservations. It took me out of my comfort zone."

A self-described sports fanatic, Gordon played football and lacrosse in high school, then played a year with the Vermont Ravens, a semi-pro, or "club" football team in central Vermont. He has also coached junior high and youth teams in the area. Since coming to WEC he’s taken up running.

"Patty got me into it," he says, referring to WEC’s general manager, Patty Richards. "It’s fun seeing someone so passionate about it. We ran the 5-K Corporate Cup," held in Montpelier last May.

Gordon’s cousin, Scott Matheson, is a WEC apprentice line worker.

"He had nothing but good things to say about the Co-op," says Gordon. "But with his background in customer service, Gordon decided the MSR job, which had become available, was a better fit. It also provides a more predictable schedule, which, he says, allows him to be fully a partner with Desiree – a manager at Positive Pie in Montpelier – in parenting Mila."

"I want to have a real relationship with my little girl," he adds, "so that when I go home she’s really glad to see me."

Please join WEC’s staff in welcoming Gordon, WEC’s newest Member Services Representative, to the Co-op team.

A Reminder: Vermont Now Recycles Batteries, and WEC Will Gladly Take Yours Off Your Hands!

In 2014, Vermont was the first state to pass legislation requiring battery manufacturers to receive and recycle their used batteries. The state now provides many official drop-off locations for used batteries, but if it’s easier for you to stop by the Co-op’s home in East Montpelier we’d be glad to receive them and take it from there. The most important thing is to keep them out of the landfill!

The battery-recycling law applies to most non-rechargeable batteries.

Bring yours at any time.
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.

WEC’s 2016 Equity Distribution Plan
Co-op Seeks Former Members For Capital Credit Refunds

To qualify for a refund, former Co-op members must have a minimum of $20 coming to them from their capital credit accounts, and must have submitted a properly executed authorization form to the Co-op by October 7, 2016. Current members who are eligible for refunds will receive their refund as a credit on their electric bill.

Alternatively, members, both current and former, can choose to contribute their 2015 capital credit refunds to the Community Fund administered by Washington Electric Cooperative. More than 1,300 people have taken the opportunity to do so – many on a permanent, recurring basis – and more are always welcome. Funds contributed by members in 2016 will be combined with any remaining, unspent monies in the Fund. The funds make financial contributions to qualifying community causes. per WEC Policy 6. A year-end report on 2016 Community Fund activities will be published in Co-op Currents in an issue early in 2017.

All individual refunds will be reduced by any uncollectible or delinquent amount(s) owed to the Cooperative, as permitted by the WEC Bylaws. No early retirements will be made to the estates of deceased members.

Earlier this summer WEC sent out Capital Patronage Refund Authorizations to eligible former members, using the person's last-known address. Listed below are the names of people or accounts whose authorizations were returned as undeliverable. WEC is asking friends, acquaintances, and relatives of the people listed here to contact those potential recipients or their right heirs, and to have the former member or beneficiary contact Washington Electric Cooperative directly, at 800-223-5245, toll-free at 1-800-932-5245. WEC will issue this year's capital credit refunds in November.

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WEC’s practice has been to divide its capital credit distributions (FIFO in first, in first out) and LIFO (last in, first out) plans. The former is an approach that pays earlier (or “first”) members, and the latter term (LIFO) applies to plans which WEC’s revenues exceed its operating expenses. Capital credits are a way for the Cooperative to distribute the total amount of approximately $460,000 for distribution in 2016, which is $110,000 greater than the amount allocated for this purpose in 1993. LIFO distribution plans pay the most recent refunds to current and former members, as authorized by WEC’s Board.
Serving more than 10,800 member/owners in central Vermont. A rural electric cooperative since 1939.

www.washingtonelectric.coop

Co-op Currents, September 2016 • Page 5
Cure For The ‘Siloxane’ Problem

WEC Receives Certificate of Public Good for Fixes at Coventry

There’s not much in this world that remains consistent and predictable over long periods of time, and this applies even to the nature of the stuff we throw away. Chemists, for any number of reasons, refine the composition of their companies’ products. Customers buy the product, use it up, and throw it away. A trash-collection service picks it up with the rest of the household garbage, adds it to a mountain of other refuse, and carries it off to the New England Waste Services lined landfill in Coventry, Vermont.

And suddenly, WEC has a problem. That’s because Washington Electric Cooperative harvests the gases produced by the decomposition of materials within that landfill, pipes them to an adjacent building, and runs them through a cleansing (“scrubbing”) process to remove impurities. WEC then uses the refined methane gas to fuel five Caterpillar engines that produce about 60 percent of the electric power that Washington Electric Co-op provides to its members in a year.

It’s a neat trick – removing methane from a potent greenhouse gas from reaching the atmosphere, and using it instead to make renewable energy that reduces our state’s reliance on fossil fuels.

But changes in the waste stream’s content – not so much the products it contains, but the way they are made – have presented difficulties for the Co-op, affecting production at the generating plant and increasing the costs of maintaining the engines in good operating condition.

However, the difficulties are surmountable, and this is a report about how the Co-op, with the assistance and advice of ever-valuable consultants, has dealt with the issue.

John Murphy is a civil and environmental engineer for Stantec, a global engineering firm with New England headquarters in Boston that serves as WEC’s consultant for the Coventry plant. Murphy explains that there has been a marked increase in siloxane in the waste stream. Siloxane is a chemical compound used in an enormous range of products, from cosmetics to toothpaste to plastics, and an enormous range of products, from cosmetics to toothpaste to plastics, and it breaks down in the waste stream. Siloxane is a chemical compound used in an enormous range of products, from cosmetics to toothpaste to plastics, and an enormous range of products, from cosmetics to toothpaste to plastics.

As Murphy explains, “Siloxane creates a ripple of negative effects. By wearing parts down, it causes the engine to run less efficiently, and that affects the exhaust, which the Co-op must keep within certain parameters to comply with its air quality permit for the Coventry plant. “The result,” says WEC Operations & Engineering Director Dan Weston, “is that we’d been rebuilding the engines almost twice as often as we needed to before. And when you take an engine offline to rebuild it, you’re reducing the amount of power you’re producing at the plant.”

Yet there’s a fix for this problem, and with John Murphy’s assistance and advice the WEC Board and staff began exploring it. It’s a technological advance, born of necessity, called the siloxane removal system (SRS). Murphy explained that “it can replace the older treatment system that was sufficient in years past, when siloxanes weren’t as much of a problem. This is a more sophisticated treatment system, and it’s coming into more common use at biogas generating facilities.”

The Board undertook a competitive process of finding and hiring a contractor to make the switch – a fairly costly upgrade of the gas-treatment system that WEC has employed since opening the plant in 2005. Before proceeding with the installation of the SRS system the Co-op needed to amend its Certificate of Public Good (CPG), the permit for operating the plant that is required by the Vermont Public Service Board (PSB).

On March 18, 2016, WEC submitted its petition to the PSB, along with a site plan, pre-filed testimony and exhibits and list of adjoining landowners – required elements of its application under Section 248 (the state law that subjects energy-related projects to a review similar to the better-known Act 250, which governs development).

A decision in favor of WEC’s proposal can come relatively quickly, with an order on May 26 granting WEC permission to replace its former glycol-based scrubbing system with the SRS; to provide new, taller air-emissions stacks for the five Caterpillar engines (6.4 feet higher than the previous stacks) to address new air quality permit standards; and to install a slightly larger garage door to facilitate entry into the scrubbing room for the new equipment. Very minimal external construction at the building is needed, as is the vast majority of the work and investments.

The PSB hit the nail on the head with these findings:

• “The proposed facility upgrades will allow WEC to maximize energy production at the facility. The increased production of energy, capacity, and renewable energy credits expected to occur as a result of the Project will economically benefit WEC, its members, and the State of Vermont.”

• “The Project will reduce air pollution by maximizing the operations of the engines that burn methane emitted from the landfill. While the landfill is not operational, the collected landfill gas is diverted to a flare. Flaring produces emissions without the beneficial effect of producing energy, so maximizing the use and efficiency of the engines reduces unnecessary air emissions.”

Patty Richards, Washington Electric Co-op’s General Manager, reports that the price tag for the entire project will total around $1.8 million. Benefitting from increased energy production and lower operations and maintenance costs, the Co-op expects an attractive payback.

“There is plenty of gas coming from the landfill,” said Richards, “so much, in fact, that there are times when gas is being flared, which is a waste of that very useful fuel source for us. With improved engine performance we can use more of the gas and reduce the amount of flaring. The added energy will allow WEC to increase the value of the Coventry plant to WEC’s members.”

Siloxane in the landfill was a problem that gradually affected the plant’s production and increased its operational costs for several years. The new system will protect the environment by producing cleaner air emissions. Important, too, is that WEC’s contract for the Coventry plant extends until 2034, and can be renewed beyond that. That’s 18 more years of improved energy production and sufficient production of renewable energy for the Co-op and its members.
continued from page 1

the office building for early-morning meetings with the line crews and other Operations employees, reviewing the day's plans before they load up their trucks and head out into the Co-op's 41-town service territory. He particularly savors the depictions of the changing seasons - the splashes of color for the fall; the dingy mud season, the stark white landscape, mountains, and clouds in winter; and the lush green hills of Vermont's beautiful summer.

"It tells the story of our work, and the seasonal transitions," he says. "I think it will be kind of uplifting, when our people are working long, cold hours in the wintertime, to provide a reminder each morning and afternoon when they drive in that, just over the horizon, the summer is coming."  

Grant funding

The old building was due for a paint job this year. Built in 1973 to replace and improve upon the garage across from WEC's office building that was substantially destroyed by fire the year before, there's never been any reason for it to be glamorous, and it never will be. But like any property, it needs to be maintained. Since it's home-away-from-home for the line crew and several staff members (Plant Accountant Cathie Vandenberg, Safety & Environmental Coordinator Scott Martino, Mechanic Brad Nutbrown, and System Technicians Mike Gray and Dan Couture), the wintertime meetings this spring sometimes drifted into the sphere of what, if anything, people would like to see improved along with the paint job. Somehow, the idea of a mural cropped up - nothing elaborate, just something more interesting than a new coat of paint on the old building.

Ethan Fielder was down at the dock at his parents' home on Number Ten Pond in Woodbury one day in July when a boat pulled up. Inside it was Hans Pope-Howe, a lineman at Washington Electric Co-op.  

"He said, 'Aren't you the guy who painted the mural at Utton's Automotive (a muffler shop on River Street in Montpelier)?' " Ethan recalled later. Indeed, he was. Ethan, who is 19 years old and commencing his second year this fall at Massachusetts College of Art & Design in Boston, undertook that project when he was still a student in the Pilot program at U-32 High School, which provides alternative pathways to students interested in less-conventional education. The mural, familiar to many central Vermonters, shows a Volkswagen Beetle being worked on by men in welders' outfits. (Ethan has also done some decorative painting at Splash Naturals, a skin care-products store in downtown Montpelier.)

Hans described the mural idea at Washington Electric Co-op, and within a day or so Ethan was on the phone to WEC's Patty Richards, offering his services.

"I hadn't heard anything about it when Ethan called, but he sure got me thinking," said Richards.

"We set out to learn what it would cost to paint the side of the building, and Ethan's quote came in higher, which wasn't a surprise. We didn't think it would be appropriate for our Co-op members to pay that extra cost, but if we could get some grant funding to cover the gap we wanted to do it."

"We didn't think it would be appropriate for our Co-op members to pay that extra cost, but if we could get some grant funding to cover the gap we wanted to do it."

Patty Richards

"Between these three vendors, we got the money we needed," said Dan Weston. "They were great. They care about our crews and they care about our Co-op.

With funding secured, at no greater investment for WEC and its members than it would have taken for basic maintenance (painting the wall green), the project went forward. Ethan met with Patty and Dan, listening to their ideas about scenes the mural should include and the themes it should convey. He created images and refined them with Photoshop, a visual computer program, and went back to them for more input.

"They asked me to put in a church steeple, like the steeple in Peacham, that shows what a Vermont village looks like," Ethan said. "They wanted solar panels and wind turbines to represent renewable energy."

Looking at his mural - still a work in progress as August drew to a close - he continued, "I'm going to add the big track vehicle that's over there, inside the garage. I still need cows, and I already had solar panels but I had to adjust them to face the sunlight."

Ethan set to work on the mural on August 8. With help from his older brother, Zach, scrambling up and down ladders with a chalk line stretched between them, he blocked out large areas to be covered with base colors, from which the ripples in the landscape, the lakes and ponds nestled in the hillsides, and the roads, homesteads, power lines, vehicles, and people would emerge. The project was daunting for many reasons: one, the surface - Ethan's cement "canvas" - was big, 100 feet long and 20 feet high at the peak; two, it was interrupted in a dozen places by windows and doors and vents and other obstructions difficult to incorporate into an artwork; and three, there wasn't much time to do it! The Utton's Muffler mural, quite a bit smaller (though very intricate) had taken 100 hours. Ethan had three weeks to accomplish the WEC mural before returning to art school in Boston early in September.

"What I'd really like in the future, on a piece like this, would be six months," he said. "Three months for planning and three months for painting."

Still, he wasn't complaining. The work was intricate, and tiring - scurrying up an aluminum extension ladder, brush in hand, to add a small image or refine one already there, then scurrying back down to step back and gain perspective from a distance; reapplying paint to the brush and thinning it with water, shaking the excess off and then launching himself up the ladder again, over and over for hours every day: the frenetic and yet studious toil of a vigorous, committed - and fortunately, young - man. An artist.

Outdoor art

Mural painting at Splash Naturals, a skin care-products store in downtown Montpelier.

Ethan Fielder's mural, quite a bit smaller (though very intricate) had taken 100 hours. Ethan had three weeks to accomplish the WEC mural before returning to art school in Boston early in September.

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Cookeville, Here We Come!

WEC Community Meeting
Set For October 5

Twice each year the member/owners of Washington Electric Cooperative have an opportunity to gather in a large group for dinner and an interactive, informative meeting with the executive leaders, senior staff members, and elected directors of their electric co-op.

Or, to put it differently, the leaders of the Co-op have this biannual opportunity to meet with as many WEC members as choose to turn out, to hear what’s on their minds and discuss WEC’s policies and operational decisions with those to whom they are most responsible – the members, themselves.

One of those times is the formal Annual Membership Meeting, held in May. The other is a much less formal but no less informative “Community Meeting,” held in October, not in a centralized location like the Annual Meeting, but in some church basement, or town hall, or perhaps a school cafeteria, in one of the 41 towns within WEC’s service territory. It’s a way that the Board of Directors created in 2002 for the leadership to engage with local people who may not make the choice, in May, to travel to the Annual Meeting, and would rather gather with their neighbors for a Co-op event. WEC has been holding these community meetings every year since then, and they’ve become a tradition and an important part of Washington Electric’s calendar of events.

Now that time has rolled around again, WEC’s next Community Meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 5, 2016. This year’s location will be the Corinth Town Hall, at 1387 Cookeville Road, in the town of Corinth. (If your mailing service demands a ZIP code, it’s 05039.)

The doors will open at the town hall at 5:30 p.m., with dinner served at 6:00. Around 7 p.m., the Co-op’s President, Barry Bernstein, and General Manager, Patty Richards, will open up the discussion of the energy- and service-related issues important to the Cooperative and its members.

There is no cost for the dinner, but because our hosts in Cookeville need to reserve a meal and state your menu preference, WEC pays local public-service organizations for their efforts in preparing the meal. This year, proceeds will benefit the Waits River Valley School eighth-grade class trips, an investment in the education and the future for their students.

For anyone attending the meeting but not the dinner, no reservation is needed. While the location will obviously be most convenient to members from Corinth and nearby towns, WEC’s community meetings are open to all members of the Cooperative, and people are encouraged to come.

“We like to hear from everyone about what’s on their minds,” said General Manager Patty Richards. “But we also have some topics we want to discuss with folks. Two of these are net metering – a process that impacts all members, and therefore isn’t solely important to people who are thinking about installing their own home-generation systems – and the state’s renewable energy standard. That’s going to affect some of the things we do here at the Co-op. People should know about those, and there may be opportunities for some members to take advantage of them.”

Net metering is the statewide program under which residents and businesses have been encouraged, through financial incentives, to install their own small-scale renewable energy generating systems, and provide excess power – beyond what they consume, themselves – to the electric grid. In exchange, they receive credits toward their utility bills. For the past two years the Vermont Public Service Board (PSB) has permitted Washington Electric Cooperative to run its own version of the net metering program, as a reward for WEC’s achievements in the renewable energy sector.

However, what’s most important now about net metering is that the PSB, on orders of the Vermont Legislature, has redesigned the statewide program, effective on January 1, 2017. All utilities, including Washington Electric Co-op, will be affected, and WEC members who are attracted to the idea of participating in the program will need to know its parameters. Members not interested, or not in a position to engage in net metering, will want to know if, and how, the program affects them.

WEC will be discussing net metering program changes in these pages in forthcoming issues, but the October Community Meeting in Corinth provides a good opportunity for members to attend and engage in a discussion on the subject and its relevance to them.

Another topic on WEC’s agenda is Vermont’s “renewable energy standard,” as defined in Act 56, which was passed by the Legislature in 2015. The Act sets out three “tiers” of requirements for all Vermont’s electric utilities, but since WEC already largely meets or exceeds the first two tiers, it is Tier 3 – the “energy transformation program” – that stands to impact the Cooperative the most. Bernstein and Richards will lead a discussion on this subject, but a brief summary is that utilities will need to adopt programs that assist their customers, or members, in reducing their use of fossil fuel energy. It’s a recognition that electricity is just one sphere of energy usage, and that Vermont must tackle fossil fuel consumption in transportation and other realms if the state is to meet the renewable energy goal (80 percent) it has set for itself by 2050.

“Our Co-op has to file a tariff – which means our plan – to comply with the 2017 net metering order by October 15,” says Richards. “And it’s pretty much the same with the renewable energy standard. We have to gear up and get these programs ready to roll out by the first of the new year.”

So there’s lots to talk about in the energy world, a world in which – statewide, at least – Washington Electric Co-op has long played an active, innovative, and progressive role. And make no mistake about it: changes in how electric utilities operate and what is required of them can and do impact their ratepayers.

“We want all our members to use energy efficiently,” says General Manager Richards, “and for power they do use we will serve it from renewable resources. It is a win for our members and a win for the environment. Through these new programs, WEC will be working on non-electric energy program offerings such as how you heat your home and how you get around on the roads. We’ll have much more to tell our members concerning these programs soon.”

It’s a good reason for members to attend the Corinth Community Meeting. It’s bound to be an interesting evening. You’ll be there, right?

Dinner Reservation

(No charge for the dinner.)

2016 Community Meeting
October 5, 2016 • Corinth Town Hall
Dinner @ 6:00pm • Meeting @ 7:00pm

Meeting Agenda:
• Meet & greet WEC staff and Board of Directors
• What’s on your mind

Name ____________________________  (Please print clearly)
Member or Guest
Vegetarian

Name ____________________________  (Please print clearly)
Member or Guest
Vegetarian

Name ____________________________  (Please print clearly)
Member or Guest
Vegetarian

Address __________________________________________________________________________

Account #___________________  Map # ________ Telephone _____________________

Special needs (gluten free food or accommodations): ____________________________________

Reservations must be received at the Co-op by September 23.
WEC Attn: Dawn Johnson, P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651

To call the Co-op, dial 223-5245 Mon - Thu 7:30 am – 5 pm and Fri 7:30 am – 4 pm; toll-free for reporting outages & emergencies, 1-800-WEC-5245.