Reliability is About to Get a Whole Lot Better in Northfield

WEC digs under the interstate as part of improvement plan

Imagine every time the wind blows, you worry you’ll lose power. That’s been the situation for many WEC members in Northfield. The Northfield feeder line—a three-phase line that heads toward East Rutland from the Jackson Corners substation—and a single-phase line off that feeder are being targeted for reliability improvements.

The main problem is the extreme terrain the three-phase line traverses. Utility Field Technician Brian Wilkin, who is managing the project, said members of the operations team have been working on the line since January of this year. In the wake of the destructive late October windstorm of 2017, they’ve been spotting trees at risk of falling on lines from outside the Co-op’s right of way and looking for damaged insulators on top of poles—which involves a rugged hike with a pair of binoculars to look for cracks in the equipment at the top of each pole. “We’ve tried to get ahead of equipment failure by physically walking the line,” he said. In the meantime, tree crews have been working nonstop to clear the line of undergrowth and danger trees.

When members call in to tell us about outages, we’re listening. We got all these calls from this one area, and we said, ok, what the heck was going on?—Patty Richards

“We’ve heard loud and clear from our members that reliability in this area is not good, and we are going to fix that,” said General Manager Patty Richards. “When members call in to tell us about outages, we’re listening. We got all these calls from this one area, and we said, ok, what the heck was going on? Then we could fix it.” The line, which serves 1,301 Co-op members, travels about 14 miles through heavy woods away from roadways. A three- to four-mile long single-phase tap near the end of the feeder serves 128 members and has been affected the most by outages. “It’s not acceptable,” Operations Manager Dan Weston says of that line’s reliability. “But it is fixable and we have a plan in place to improve reliability.”

That single-phase line ends very close to Interstate I-91, near the Northfield exit. So WEC is working to connect that line to the line on the other side of the interstate, putting poles as close to the highway as possible and then running line underneath the road.

When the power goes out for either an unplanned outage (a tree falls ok, what the heck was going on?)—continued on page 8

Nancy and Jim Clark of West Topsham, a nurse and retired climate scientist, did not expect their life paths would have them selling baskets at craft fairs. Nor did Nancy anticipate founding a nonprofit based halfway around the world, or spending 5-10 weeks each year in Zimbabwe. “What always strikes me is we just fell into it,” mused Jim. “It’s the work of the Zienzele Foundation, which supports AIDS orphans and their caregivers by providing a market for baskets and other crafts produced by women’s cooperatives in tiny Zimbabwe villages. “If anyone is willing to listen to the story,” said Nancy, “they’ll buy a basket.”

Zienzele means “self-reliance,” which is the core value of the foundation. There is some kismet in how Zienzele began: in 1998, the Clarks’ daughter worked on a project with Earthwatch, an international environmental research and action nonprofit whose field expeditions immerse participants in global sustainability issues. Nancy flipped through the catalog and grew interested in a program addressing women and children’s nutrition in Zimbabwe. She called and secured the only volunteer spot left. The team was led by Prisca Nemapare, a Zimbabwean nutrition researcher and professor at Ohio State. After two and a half weeks working on health assessments, nutrition, and...—continued on page 6

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CO-OP CURRENTS

WASHINGTON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

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WEC Deploys AEDs in Its Service Fleet

By Will Lindner

People are seeing them, more and more, in public places: AED cabinets, mounted on the walls in airports, shopping malls, office buildings, and schools. Like many workplaces, Washington Electric Cooperative keeps an AED in plain sight in its headquarters in East Montpelier, and another in its operations center a mile away. AED stands for “automated external defibrillator,” and it’s a lifesaving device that even a layperson can use in an emergency to rescue someone experiencing sudden cardiac arrest.

The best way to get rapid assistance to people suffering such an episode, the American Heart Association says, is by providing access to AEDs that bystanders, friends, or coworkers can use to defibrillate a victim’s heart.

That’s why another place that AEDs can be found nowadays is in the Co-op’s trucks and off-road vehicles. Nearly half of Washington Electric’s employees work in Operations; they’re lineworkers, engineers, and others whose work takes them out into WEC’s far-flung, very rural territory. If there’s a heart emergency in the field, the AED unit back in the garage won’t do them any good.

And because they work in close proximity to 60-cycle (Hz) alternating current – the standard for AC current in the United States – line workers are at somewhat elevated risk of a fibrillation incident. Exposure at just a fraction of a second can cause a life-threatening injury.

“First and foremost, we preach safety,” said WEC Engineering & Operations Director Dan Weston. “That means de-energizing the lines before working on them, making sure to ground the current, wearing insulated gloves and all other protective gear. But things can happen. For example, during a storm, they might be working where there’s a downed wire, and someone nearby has turned on a generator that’s not properly disconnected from the system and it sends current down the line from where they’re not expecting it.”

“If something like this were to occur and send one of our workers’ heart into irregular rhythm,” Weston said, “the AED greatly enhances the odds that he’ll survive. Normal chest compressions will not get the heart back into the correct rhythm.”

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the AED is that it provides its own voice instructions. “You open it up and activate it, and it tells you what to do,” said Weston. “If you don’t do it right, it won’t work.”

The AED kit includes sensors that the operator applies to the victim’s torso. There’s a razor for clearing away body hair, and voice commands tell the operator where to attach the sensors. Once they’re in place, the internal computer monitors the victim’s heart to determine whether defibrillation is needed. If it is, the operator follows the command to press a “shock” button that stuns the heart and allows it to resume its correct rhythm. The machine then provides a tempo for performing chest compressions.

All the while, presumably, a medical emergency team is on its way, summoned by a call someone has made to 911.

“We want people to know we have AEDs Today says that if someone in cardiac arrest receives defibrillation within the first minute of his or her affliction, the survival rate is 90 percent. But every moment counts. Citing statistics from the American Heart Association, AEDs Today says, “First and foremost, we preach safety,” said WEC Engineering & Operations Director Dan Weston. “If something like this were to occur and send one of our workers’ heart into irregular rhythm,” Weston said, “the AED greatly enhances the odds that he’ll survive. Normal chest compressions will not get the heart back into the correct rhythm.”

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“We serve a rural membership, who are usually miles away from any kind of medical assistance,” said Bernstein. “We want people to know we have these AEDs in some of our vehicles, in case it presents an opportunity to get help to someone quickly in an emergency.”

Going mobile

WEC purchased its first three AEDs for its vehicle fleet about three years ago. With input from lineworkers, one went in WEC’s large digger truck (used, among other tasks, for installing utility poles).

An AED, or Automated External Defibrillator, can save the life of a person experiencing cardiac arrest.

WEC is part of the alliance working to advance and support the principles of cooperatives in Vermont.

The best way to get rapid assistance to people suffering such an episode, the American Heart Association says, is by providing access to AEDs that bystanders, friends, or coworkers can use to defibrillate a victim’s heart.

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Fall at Co-op Brings Members Cash and Conversation

Employee appreciation, revenue returns, rate design meeting, Button Up funds available, Coventry Open House, Community Meeting

Barry: August 9 was WEC Employee Appreciation Day—not that every day isn’t. I have so much respect for and am proud of the whole Co-op culture. I was talking with Mike Patterson in the engineering department and we were talking about his 27 years as part of the Co-op. One thing Mike said is he’s so proud to be part of an organization that puts the member first, and always has, and all the employees here grow up within that culture. Remember last issue’s letter from a member about how Larry [Gilbert, Right of Way Manager] gave his lunch to her? That’s just second nature to our employees.

Patty: Barry, that was spot on. You really captured the essence of the Co-op. For a small group of hardworking employees, we’re always thinking about the members and how to do best by them.

Barry: Mike also mentioned that he was so appreciative of the Co-op board, the time we spend on things, and that members of the board serve meals to employees at the church next to our office during storms. From my perspective, that’s a time our board gets to look at everybody working during these storms and know even though they’re tired they’re still going out there. It’s a very special spirit you don’t see anywhere but here.

Patty: I agree completely.

Co-op returns extra revenue in November

Patty: As a co-op, not only is our culture about the people and communities we serve, but capital credits are a distinction between co-ops and other utilities in the state. When we take in more money than we need to keep the power on, we give it back. Only WEC and Vermont Electric Co-op give money back to their members. For-profit utilities keep profits for their shareholders. Municipal utilities are not-for-profit, but they don’t return excess dollars each year. We return our extra funds. It’s a process unique to co-ops.

Barry: I continually have members ask why they got a credit on their bill in November… My response is, that’s the Co-op difference. Co-ops give back extra revenues to the people we serve.

– Barry Bernstein

Patty: Right. Every dollar we collect we give back in donations.

Rate design meeting September 19

Barry: We’re going to have a meeting at the Old Brick Church, next to the Co-op office in East Montpelier, on September 19 [see p. 2]. We’re looking for more member input as we move ahead with our new rate design.

Patty: We’re getting feedback from members in response to the rate design story we ran in the last Co-op Currents. We encourage people to come to the meeting if they can attend. At the end of the day, we’re fundamentally doing this to address two things: climate change and energy costs—that’s the total energy bill people pay, not just electricity. I’m happy to discuss this, one on one or at the meeting. People can call or email me at the office: 802-223-5245 or patty.richards@wec.coop. I’m happy to talk and I respond to emails.

Button Up funds available for home and transportation updates

Patty: The Button Up incentives continue! I want to remind members we have to meet energy requirements from the state, and if we don’t, we have to pay penalties. The requirements increase each year. We have money to give away and if we don’t meet the state’s goals, we’re going to get charged. Given the choice between basically paying a fine to the state for not becoming more efficient, and giving money to our members to do upgrades to be more energy efficient, we choose the second. We’d much rather spend that money helping our members.

Barry: Button Up goes hand in hand with rate design. Moving away from inefficient and fossil fuel energy is something we need to be doing anyway, regardless of whether the state set the goals or not. It’s part of our mission as an electric co-op.

We have two electric vehicle incentives: there are Button Up incentives for low to moderate income members, and Freedom Nissan is offering another deep discount on their all-electric Leaf. There’s something for everyone.

Coventry Open House September 15

Patty: This year’s Open House is September 15 from 10-2. It’s not only the generating plant but the entire landfill. It’s an opportunity to see the whole process, from taking in waste, to sending methane into WEC’s power plant and making electricity. Folks can see the whole cycle from waste to electricity.

Barry: When we entered into an agreement with Casella Waste Management in 2003 to build our generation plant, it was in partnership because they wanted to make sure the methane gas was used as productively as possible instead of just flaring it. Methane is 20-40 times as potent as carbon dioxide and this way it’s being used to energize 5-7000 homes. I’m proud of that and want to commend Casella for working with us to use that gas. And the Co-op just spent two million to put a new SRS device in to make the air coming out of the plant continue on page 8
Co-op Returns $750,000 in 2018 Refunds; Seeks Former Members for Distribution

For-profit utilities take in excess revenue, it makes their shareholders richer. But when electric cooperatives like WEC take in excess revenue, that money is returned to the co-op’s members. This fall WEC will issue these refunds, commonly called capital credit, retirements, to current and former members.

This year, the Board will refund eligible members on the Co-op’s lines in years 1995-2017. An additional amount will be returned to members on the lines in 2013 for what WEC calls Contributions in Aid of Construction. The Co-op will return $750,000 altogether, or approximately $30,000 more than was returned in 2017.

All individual refunds will be reduced by any uncollectible or delinquent amounts owed to the Co-op. Co-op members rarely retire to be made the estate of deceased members. WEC will issue year’s refunds in November, 2018.

How it works

Refunds are allocated to co-op members for years in which WEC’s revenues exceed its operating expenses. The credit a member receives for a particular year is determined by two factors: the amount of excess revenue the Co-op received, and the amount that member paid for electricity.

WEC’s practice is to divide distributions between seven years back and the most recent year the Co-op took in excess revenue. The idea is to include everyone: new members that become eligible for capital credits, current members, long-term members, and former members. People who have moved off WEC lines also receive refunds. Former members may direct their refund to the Community Fund, as a one-time gift or in perpetuity.

The Community Fund supports small-not-for-profits serving Central Vermont communities. The people served by these organizations are often WEC members. Managed by co-op board members, the Community Fund has no administrative costs. "The Community Fund is inspiring and rewarding all in one. Every dollar we collect from our generous members goes right back out into Central Vermont communities. It is a terrific way to help small non-profits in their missions and it makes a real difference locally," said General Manager Paddy Richards.

In 2018, WEC returned $38,465 to 74 causes in Central Vermont; the recipient list is in the July 2018 issue of Co-op Currents. A year-end report on 2018 Community Fund activities will be published in Co-op Currents in 2019.

Co-op Community Fund

WEC’s Community Fund exists through the generosity of current and former co-op members who donate their capital credit refunds. Any current or former member may direct their refund to the Community Fund, as a one-time gift or in perpetuity.

People who have moved off WEC lines also receive refunds. Former members must have a minimum $20 capital credit distribution, and must submit an authorization form to the Co-op by September 28, 2018 to be eligible. Earlier this summer WEC sent Credit Capital Patronage Refund Authorization to eligible former members. Listed below are the names of people or accounts whose authorizations were returned as undeliverable. If you know anyone on this list or their rightful heirs, please have the former member or beneficiary contact Washington Electric Cooperative directly, at 802-223-5245. Eligible current members receive refunds as a credit on their November electric bills, regardless of the amount.

Co-op Currents

www.washingtonelectric.coop

To call the Co-op, dial 802-223-5245 Mon - Thur 7:30 am – 5 pm and Fri 7:30 am – 4 pm; toll-free for reporting outages & emergencies, 1-800-WEC-5245.
Serving more than 10,800 member/owners in central Vermont. A rural electric cooperative since 1939.
Zienzele Foundation

continued from page 1

food access, Nancy was hooked. She returned the following year as team leader, and when Zimbabwe’s instability caused Earthwatch to pull the program in 2000, Nancy returned on her own to work with Nemapare. Eventually, Nemapare retired from her professorship and relocated to Harare, Zimbabwe’s capital.

At that time, the AIDS epidemic was killing thousands of Zimbabweans, and scores of children were orphaned. A group of grandmothers approached Nancy and Nemapare for help. “These women said, ‘We’ve had all these grandchildren dropped on our doorstep as our children are dying of HIV. We can’t feed or clothe them or send them to school. You have to help us,’” said Nancy. While she and Nemapare wanted to help, they didn’t have any simple solutions to such a monumental problem. So they asked the women what they could do for themselves.

The women of the village had several marketable skills, Nancy said. Many wove traditional baskets, though they lacked a market for them. Others could sew, but had no sewing machines; or could garden, but lacked plots.

With this framework, Nancy and Nemapare founded Zienzele; a year later, Jim applied for nonprofit status in the U.S. They figured if they could provide the market, the women could sell crafts to support their households. Zienzele buys baskets directly from the artisans, at their asking price. The foundation resells them. Then, all proceeds from Zienzele’s basket sales pay for orphans’ school fees. Which is how the Clark’s came to spend “at least 15 weekends a year peddling baskets wherever we can,” they said, at Vermont fairs like the Quechee Balloon Festival, and in Massachusetts and New York. Baskets are also available on their website, zienzele.org.

Zienzele began working with one group of weavers, and “now there are 46 groups of women making baskets,” said Nancy. Zienzele works with 350 women and pays for 900 kids’ school fees each year. Jim added, “We figure we’ve paid school fees for over 14,000 kids.”

“It’s not like we brought in brilliant ideas to solve their dilemmas.” The women artisans of Zienzele decided to do something to help themselves and the children of their communities, she said. “They’ve been empowered when before they were marginalized.”

And, she said, it’s critical that Zienzele is homegrown—she and Nemapare didn’t swoop in with a prepackaged fix. “One of the reasons we’ve been so successful is Prisca and I didn’t know what we were doing,” she exclaimed. “It’s the women’s work and their ideas. It’s not like we brought in brilliant ideas to solve their dilemmas.”

The structure works something like this: Nancy is the president of Zienzele; Prisca Nemapare is the vice president; and Jim serves as secretary/treasurer—all volunteer. Each village elects a Zienzele representative to watch over the children. Three coordinators oversee these representatives. Nancy has 20-year relationships with most of these people, dating back to her earliest work in Zimbabwe. Each women’s group functions as a cooperative. Nancy and Nemapare offered guidance as the women developed a business structure and helped them develop a simple but effective budget plan: “They save a third, reinvest a third, and share a third,” she explained.

Paradoxes of market growth

The Clark’s are now examining how to expand Zienzele’s markets. Several of the elements that make Zienzele unique—and successful—also create growth paradoxes: for one, because the organization’s mission is to foster self-reliance, Jim said, they’ve chosen not to seek grant funding (though rotary clubs, church groups, schools, and hospitals have all given gifts or supplies). For another, the organization’s smallness is an asset: surging incomes, Nancy explained, would risk attracting Zimbabwe’s notorious corruption. Other forays quickly become complicated. Partnering with retail outlets to sell baskets would make sense if the organization were serving only the artisans. But because 100% of resale profits pay for orphans’ school fees, they’re wary about any deal that might compromise that financial commitment. So they’re looking at finding bigger markets willing to distribute according to the working model. “These all take a lot of involvement and time, but it’s the direction we need to go to let it be a bigger business model,” said Nancy, adding that like many nonprofits, their goal is to eventually solve their way out of their work.

Child Headed Households

A generation of AIDS orphans has grown up in the two decades Nancy has been working in Zimbabwe. “People were dying all the time in the beginning,” said Nancy, adding that now, while HIV cases are still high, people are living with access to medicine. Three years ago, she said, they held their first wellness clinic that wasn’t entirely focused on HIV. As far as human systems go, it’s hard to
predict what happens when the dust settles. “It’s difficult to look at the impact of HIV on the country—we don’t have any idea what that will be because all of these kids have lost the scaffolding of a family unit,” Nancy said.

These kids are the focus of Zienzele’s Child Headed Households program. Usually in their early teens, they’re either solo or caring for younger siblings, sometimes living with an elderly grandmother, sometimes entirely on their own. Zienzele matches donors with these families; donors’ annual gifts provide quarterly packages of food, clothes, and other support items, plus the comfort of a proxy family relationship thousands of miles away. Nancy packs suitcases full for them when she goes to Zimbabwe, and Jim said she builds a relationship with every single child Zienzele supports while she’s there.

One recently told her, “When I was little, and you used to tell me, ‘I’ll see you in September,’ I would go home and cry, because I wouldn’t see you till September,” she recalled. “These are kids!” Of 15 Zienzele youth in postsec-

ondary education now, she says, 13 are from child headed households. “They’ve had the resiliency chip plugged in out of necessity,” she said.

Now is a pivotal, though uncertain, moment in Zimbabwe’s history. Last year the military forced president Robert Mugabe to resign after a nearly 40-year reign marked by violence and corruption. People maintained hope for years, said Nancy, even as AIDS devastated families, and food, education, and economic systems were all depleted. The political climate was too unstable for her usual spring trip this year, she said, “but I’m going in September, by God!” If all goes as planned, she said, she’ll be there with Priska Nemapare as well as fellow volunteer Cynthia Stadler to lead cervical cancer screenings and lead workshops on adolescent health and reproductive health. And she’ll check in with the kids. The kids are waiting for her.

For more information, visit zienzele.org.

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Get to Know Your WEC

Tyler Skinner

Have you ever wondered who that is fixing the line up your road, or who you spoke to when you called in about an outage or a bill? Co-op Currents profiles Co-op staff in this feature.

Tyler Skinner

How he got started

Tyler is an Apprentice Lineman who started at WEC in July 2017, right after graduating from Southeast Lineman Training Center. Before training to work on the lines, he worked as an electrician in Milton, his hometown. “I always wanted to be a lineman,” he claimed, saying since he was a child he studied crews at work: “I watched these guys working in my parents woods, and I was just mesmerized by what they were doing,” he said. He’s always liked working with electricity, he added.

Multi-sport athlete

Tyler lives in Barre with his longtime girlfriend. They enjoy biking together and being outdoors. Tyler also likes to make time for metal detecting with his dad and helping out family members who need electrical or handy work done around their homes. “I like to help people,” he explained.

As someone who loves adrenaline and being outside, Tyler pushes himself to try new activities and improve on skills. He fishes, and recently discovered he enjoys golf! “My best last year was an 83. It only happened once, though,” he said and got a pass to keep working on his game this summer.

WEC Deploys AEDs

continued from page 2

poles) and two went in the bucket trucks the crews use for aerial work at the top of poles, along the wires, and for cutting back tree limbs.

Recently, WEC purchased three more AEDs. The Operations team decided one would go in the largest of the bucket trucks, another in the track vehicle used for work in hard-to-reach locations, and the third rides in the on-call truck that crews use for responding to outages at night and on weekends.

But since the AEDs are portable, they can be switched among any of the vehicles. “The idea is to have an AED in at least one vehicle on every project,” said WEC Safety & Environmental Compliance Specialist Rick Stergas. These can include line-reconstruction and relocation projects, or restoration projects involving multiple crews after a storm or other incident.

“People respond differently under pressure,” he explained. “The AED has practice and are familiar with the device; AED, CPR, and First Aid trainings for the line crews are annual requirements under VOSH (Vermont Occupational Safety and Health Administration).

The cost of AEDs has dropped significantly since WEC purchased its first ones for about $4,000 apiece. They now cost around $1,600, and the price had practice and are familiar with the device; AED, CPR, and First Aid trainings for the line crews are annual requirements under VOSH (Vermont Occupational Safety and Health Administration).

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“That sounds like a lot of money,” Weston conceded, “but you’re talking about a tool that can make a difference between someone living or dying.”

“People respond differently under pressure,” he explained. “The AED helps them to keep calm and help faster in an emergency if they’ve had practice and are familiar with the device; AED, CPR, and First Aid trainings for the line crews are annual requirements under VOSH (Vermont Occupational Safety and Health Administration).

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Dinner Reservation

(No charge for the dinner.)

2018 Community Meeting

Groton Community Building • October 25, 2018 • 5:30 to 8:00

Doors open: 5:30 • Dinner: 6:00pm • Meeting: 7:00pm • Wrap up: 8:00 pm

Meeting Agenda:

• Meet and greet WEC staff and Board of Directors
• Reliability • Rate Design • What’s on your mind

Name ____________________________ [ ] Vegetarian [ ] Member or [ ] Guest
Name ____________________________ [ ] Vegetarian [ ] Member or [ ] Guest
Name ____________________________ [ ] Vegetarian [ ] Member or [ ] Guest
Name ____________________________ [ ] Vegetarian [ ] Member or [ ] Guest

Address ____________________________

Account #___________________  Map # ________ Telephone _____________________

Email ____________________________

Special needs (food or accommodations): ______________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

(No charge for the dinner.)

You Are Invited—Thursday, October 25, 2018

WEC Community Meeting

Doors open at 5:30 p.m.  Dinner begins at 6 p.m.

Please join WEC staff, directors, and members at a dinner meeting and informational discussion on Thursday, October 25, 2018. The meeting will begin with dinner at 6 p.m. followed by discussion on topics of interest to you and your community. While reservations are required for the dinner, it is not necessary to preregister for the informational portion of the meeting which will begin at approximately 7 p.m.

The dinner meeting, to benefit the Groton Recreation Committee, will be held at the Groton Community Building, 1478 Scott Hwy, Groton, VT 05046. The buffet menu for the evening includes spaghetti (meat and vegetarian), rolls, salad, beverages and ice cream and brownie dessert.

To make a reservation for the dinner meeting, please fill out the reservation form and return it to WEC, Attn: Dawn Johnson, PO Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651 or by email Dawn.Johnson@wec.coop.

There is no charge for the meal. Reservations must be received at the Co-op by the morning of October 12.

Thank you.
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through the wires) or a planned outage (a line crew shuts off power to fix broken equipment) it’s disruptive to the people who rely on that line’s power. One way to improve reliability is to have a backup route for power to reach members. That’s why WEC is taking a multi-pronged approach to improve reliability for all members on the Northfield feeder line, and especially for the 128 members on the single phase at the end of the feeder, explained Wilkin. Clearing danger trees and replacing faulty equipment prevents outages. A new line under the interstate connecting the two lines will ensure when an outage does occur, members will get the lights back on much faster with power from a redundant source. It’s called backfeeding. “We’ll keep people energized while we’re fixing the problem,” he said. “We have these types of things throughout the system to try to limit the amount of people that are out. This one’s a little unique in that we’re going underneath the interstate.”

WEC has already reached out to VTrans, the state Agency of Transportation, to make sure the project is doable. The state gave a preliminary nod to the idea, and Wilkin said they need to map the line and finish the highway permitting process. Once that’s done, he said, “the tentative plan is to get it in by the time the snow flies.”

“This is what our rural co-op looks like,” said WEC Board Member Annie Reed of Mansfield. Electric co-ops were developed to serve rural communities left behind by for-profit utilities, she pointed out, and WEC’s plan for Northfield is an investment that directly benefits WEC’s rural consumer-owners. “We’re committed to making the deep investment to take care of our members. We’re paying for lines through challenging terrain to improve reliability for 128 people,” she said.

Weston said those 128 members should see their reliability improve dramatically, but to not expect perfection. “That area gets hammered by microbursts and heavy snow. And then there’s the problematic emerald ash borer we’re all now facing,” he said, referring to the invasive pest that kills ash trees. Dying trees is a problem in general; a grove of dead trees near a power line is a problem too.

Wilkin reiterated that success comes only with a comprehensive improvement plan: removing trees that pose a risk to lines, spotting faulty equipment before it fails, and building in redundancies. It makes a big difference for those members whose power is especially vulnerable and who brace for an outage every time a storm rolls through. The line going under the interstate is one “piece of the puzzle to improve reliability,” he said. “We’re trying to be as proactive as possible.”

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even cleaner.

WEC members along a single-phase line near the end of the Northfield three-phase feeder will see marked improvements in reliability after WEC puts a line under I-89 to connect them to another source of power. The new connector will go under the interstate off Ferno Road, near the exit. The line construction is part of WEC’s comprehensive plan to improve reliability for members along the Northfield feeder.

Patty: There’s a high quality renewable generation plant at the landfill. The expansion of the landfill will allow continuation of the generation plant for the long term.

Community Meeting in Groton October 25

Barry: When is the Community Meeting, Patty?

Patty: October 25 in Groton! This is another difference between electric co-ops and other utilities: we hold meetings with our consumer-owners. We’ll have details and signup info to come; mark your calendar for dinner out with your Co-op on the 25th.

Barry: We’ve got a great meeting turnout for these meetings over the last few decades. It’s a really great opportunity for Co-op staff and board to sit down and share a meal with members and listen to them, and for members to hear about different aspects of the Co-op’s operations, and for us to answer any questions you have. I’m always excited for these meetings. As a co-op we work to make sure every member has input and that they’re heard.

Patty: We dig into substantive issues and we really hear what’s on consumer-owners’ minds. People stand up and ask great questions. I really enjoy these meetings.

Barry: Another thing we’ve done successfully is work with community groups where the dinner is held, so the dinner benefits a local nonprofit organization or effort. It’s always something for the community, whether the school or a community club or a playground or a rec club. That added benefit is the Co-op is helping those organizations support a project in their community.

Patty: If any local organization trying to do a fundraiser wants to know more about participating in a Community Meeting, we’re always looking for local folks to help with the meal and clean up. Any folks interested can contact me at the office at 802-223-5245.

On September 15, WEC and Casella Waste Management hosted an open house at Coventry Landfill. Visitors learned about landfill operations as well as WEC’s landfill methane electricity generation plant. More to come in the October issue.

Peter and Pearl Keene of It Suits Us Farm in Topsham planted the seeds WEC gave out at the Annual Meeting in May. By August, the seeds had grown into a riot of orange and gold cosmos flowers. The Keenes wrote, “They were a nice surprise as we did not know what we were getting! They add a good color palette to our many different flowers and plants that abound in our gardens.” Many thanks to the Keenes for the picture!