

Operations Crew Ready for 2022

One of the many factors that made 2021 historic was the state of labor. Across the country, across industries, for many different reasons, people left jobs or changed employers. In settled times, WEC has a fairly settled workforce, with employees regularly celebrating 10, 20, even 30 year work anniversaries with the Co-op. But this past year, WEC experienced the shifting labor market as well, as positions throughout the Co-op turned over.

Change can be healthy, as Board President Steve Knowlton often reminds Co-op staff and members. But it can sometimes be disruptive, and when an essential service provider has too many job openings, it can be a cause for concern. So, this past year, WEC leadership took steps to strengthen WEC's Operations department. And it appears it paid off.

Former Operations & Engineering Director Dan Weston retired in the first half of 2021, and WEC hired Dave Kresock as its new department head. Kresock brought significant experience not just in utility engineering but specifically in rolling out high-speed fiber. He arrived as the market for experienced lineworkers grew more and more competitive, and nearby utilities were offering jobs to WEC crew members. The Board of Directors was faced with the task of keeping highly skilled, compatible

We've been lucky to get the guys we did.

— Amos Turner, Construction Foreman

team members working at the Co-op on the verge of broadband rollout, during a labor shortage and a pandemic, just ahead of storm season. In the meantime, WEC is a small utility with some of the steepest, rockiest, most heavily wooded terrain in the state, with shifts in elevation that create wind tunnels and varying types and levels of precipitation. Field work at WEC is tough.

Faced with the potentially dangerous consequences of having an understaffed Operations department, WEC's Board of Directors considered how to retain staff. This past year, the Board negotiated a raise with the union that represents the line crew, making WEC competitive with other Vermont utilities. Meanwhile, Kresock and leaders in the department focused on making good hires. At the close of 2021, WEC counted seven new staff on the Operations team who'd been hired within the year. They range from highly experienced to fresh out of lineworker school, and, said Kresock, it's a great team.

WEC's newest crewmembers are: Gordon Chandler, apprentice lineworker; Rob Duranleau, first class lineworker; Dylan Gagnon, apprentice lineworker; Justin Lemieux, first class lineworker; Ryan Martel, apprentice lineworker;

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From left to right: Dylan Gagnon, Ryan Martel, Justin Lemieux, Rob Duranleau, Richard Pateta, Gordon Chandler, Josh Pierce. All seven joined WEC's operations department within the past year.

Bernstein and Reed Will Not Run Again, Opening Two Seats on WEC's Board of Directors

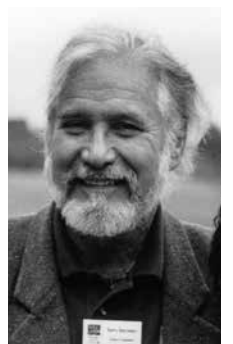
Longtime WEC directors and officers Barry Bernstein and Annie Reed have announced they do not plan to run for re-election to the Board in 2022. This opens two of the three Board seats up for election. Incumbent Steven Farnham will run for re-election.

The Board of Directors sets policy and develops the long term vision of Washington Electric Cooperative. Every year, elections are held for three of WEC's nine Board seats. Co-op members are invited to participate in democracy and run for a seat.

If you are considering running for a seat on WEC's Board, contact WEC Administrative Assistant Rosie Casciero at 802-224-2322 to request



Annie Reed



Barry Bernstein

a candidate packet.

Deadlines are coming up quickly: The deadline to submit materials for inclusion in *Co-op Currents* is February 4. The deadline to submit all materials, including support from a minimum of 25 WEC members, is

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Washington Electric Cooperative
East Montpelier, VT 05651

Inside

How decisions get made: Steve and Louis discuss the factors shaping policies at WEC. President's and General Manager's Message, p.2

EV experience: Member Lauri Scharf of Middlesex writes about EV ownership. P. 4.

Efficiency Vermont: 2022 incentives and updates from Vermont's energy efficiency utility. P. 6.



Israel and Cathie Helfand, the Cabot-based therapists behind the world-renowned couple's retreat Marriage Quest, had to put their work on hold during the pandemic shutdown, leaving them with time to think about how broadband access could help their business. P. 8.

President's and General Manager's Message

Cost Equity and Policy Evolution at a Time of Change

Steve and Louis discuss the why behind costs and policy decisions

Cost equity

Louis: We're at a strange juncture of abundance and scarcity. Our state is receiving lots of federal money for infrastructure, we are encouraging our members to purchase electric vehicles and switch over from fossil fuel to electric devices, and yet we're looking at severe shortages of transformers and other necessary infrastructure elements due to increased demand and supply chain issues. As a result, we as a utility need to have some clear priorities about how we deploy our limited resources.

Steve: This is a good teaching moment for our members. Individual choices that people may make can have an influence on a shared system.

As people put up things that change the load, like a large net metering system or a substantial electric vehicle charger, it may require upgrading the infrastructure to accommodate these changes. It's up to the utility to provide the infrastructure that ensures safe and reliable power for all members to use the appliances they want to use. Nonetheless, these upgrades come with consequences and costs that the utility must keep track of.

Louis: People make decisions to change their electrical systems at home, in some cases incentivized by the state or their utility. These changes have an impact on our grid and operations. We're trying to educate our members around this to a greater extent, even as we've tried

to encourage adoption of beneficial electrification. It can seem in opposition to each other to say EVs and heat pumps are a good thing, and also say they also have an impact that needs to be accounted for.

Steve: It's up to us to help our members understand the decisions we have to make and the issues behind our decisions in sufficient but not mind-numbing detail. WEC is part of a regulated electrical system, and the cost and revenue challenges we face are not addressed with simple reflexive choices, but come as a result of being part of a region-wide electric system. So, I've been thinking: how do we communicate some of these more detailed, nuanced ideas to members who might otherwise say, "it's just WEC raising rates"? Not that WEC wants to raise rates or not find ways to reduce increases. But before I joined the Board, I was largely ignorant of a lot of these details. It would have helped me if I'd taken the trouble to inform myself about the challenges that a cooperative utility faces carrying out its business on behalf of its members.

Louis: Absolutely. Like a lot of places, a challenge for the Co-op is the amount of information and obligations members have coming at them. It is hard for most people to get through the things they have to do and learn the things they have to learn on a daily basis, let alone understand how an electric cooperative operates because they happen to be a member. It's asking a lot of people to do that, and it's becoming more challenging for people to have the time and bandwidth to do that as well.

Steve: This is a time of change induced by the pandemic, adapting to climate change, new technologies, and third party participation in the electric business largely in terms of net metering and solar in general. We can use *Co-op Currents* to bring some of these details to the fore to engage some of the members who are interested.

Louis: There's another interesting thing about this. The transformer shortage is due to all the things we're used to hearing about these days: supply chain issues, availability of trucking and transportation, panic or

overbuying due to concerns about shortages. But the interesting thing is, years ago, the Co-op installed a lot of small five-kilowatt transformers into its system. That was a prudent thing to do decades ago due to declining electricity use and the efficiency of those transformers. Well, now we're seeing the opposite effect. Because we now understand the importance of beneficial electrification, and because of changes in tech that mean many of us have more electric devices in use, we're seeing the need to increase transformer sizes.

The interesting thing to me is the benefits and costs of electricity use and how our policies change in relation to electricity use. The very real impact, which I frankly hadn't thought of before stepping into this role, is we need larger transformers. We're taking small transformers out of the field and installing larger ones in their place. That means WEC and other utilities that installed these smaller transformers are seeing a greater impact from the shortage.

Steve: In terms of responsibility, the member's responsibility is to have to have a distribution panel to safely handle the load that they need. My understanding is whichever user causes the increased load that causes a need to change the transformer, they're the one that pays for it. There may need to be a rethink about the way those costs are distributed. It's an interesting discussion as our grid gets updated due to beneficial electrification: how does the WEC membership support this as a cooperative?

Louis: One nuance to that is, what we charge for transformers or other materials for such an upgrade lags significantly from actual costs. Ultimately, either the household putting in the change that requires that upgrade pays, or all the membership pays, in some fashion. Theoretically, it's the household, but because the costs assessed to the household are not up to date, it's effectively a mix. Other than that, I'd say Steve's exactly right. It seems in particular in the case of net metering, where the household receives a significant benefit over time for their electric bill, that they would pay; with the advent of EVs, maybe we should change. But as I think I've said in these conversations

Co-op Currents

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

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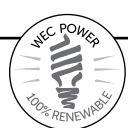
Louis Porter Donald Douglas Jean Hamilton Anne Reed Katie Titterton

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

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Got something to say?

Letter to the editor, comment, or a story tip? Drop us a line at currents@wec.coop or Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651, Attn: Co-op Currents.



before, I'm concerned about something I see in Vermont in various forms of public policy: the spreading out of costs among those with less means to benefit those with more means.

Steve: I've had that sense with net metering for some time. I became a net meterer before I joined the board, and I can see the generous tariff set by the state allows me to essentially transfer some of the cost of running WEC's system to those who don't have net metering. As Louis put it, people who don't have the means or desire to net meter, and just want their renewable electricity delivered from WEC, are partially subsidizing others. While solar net metering is not the only driver of rate increases at WEC, the growing number and size of net metered systems is indubitably becoming an increasing factor in rate pressure.

It's important for me to have a discussion about this for two reasons: first, because we're a 100 percent renewable utility, so every WEC member gets 100 percent renewable power, as indicated by the Department of Public Service. Second, as a cooperative, each member should expect to be treated as equitably as possible, and this is a system imposed on us to treat our members inequitably, that some members subsidize the energy choices of another member. I feel the way this net metering has worked out is that it has unintentionally created stresses.

I think most of us agree that solar energy is a very good thing, and when technology allows it to become more dispatchable, its benefits to the Vermont grid will only increase. The state has incentivized net metering to make it more costly than most other renewables, including that of Standard-Offer solar. This is the legislature's right, as they have many issues to consider, but the state's approach to put the resulting financial burden of net metering solely on the electric ratepayer is not likely going to encourage many of us to participate in beneficial electrification programs



The interesting thing to me is the benefits and costs of electricity use and how our policies change in relation to electricity use. The very real impact is we need larger transformers.

— Louis Porter

that are at the heart of the Comprehensive Energy Plan. Some of us may think a bit more before investing in a heat pump or electric vehicle, knowing that state policy is steadily increasing electric rates. We need to have more equitable ways of socializing the type of costs created by net metering. The challenge posed by climate change is great, and if we are to make headway, we must find better ways to work together.

Louis: I should emphasize that WEC has supported net metering, particularly smaller scale projects, in part because over time, technology should make it more beneficial for the membership at large. Over time, as our grid and other

utility grids become more advanced with battery storage and other tech, that will allow a smoothing out: when small scale renewables are usable, the benefits of net metering will go more to the membership at large and the state at large.

Steve: I agree. With storage and a more advanced, dynamically controlled grid, the future can be bright. But, if the costs of doing that are socialized throughout the state in such a way that people with less means support people with more means, that's counterproductive to moving forward.

Policy evolution

Steve: More than 20 years ago, WEC created a rate structure that incentivized low monthly electricity use. WEC was trying to induce people to conserve electricity because, at the time, many sources of electric energy were more polluting than they are now, and it was better to be efficient. Fast forward to the situation we're in now, where WEC and two other Vermont utilities distribute 100 percent renewable power, and as a state we're moving toward renewable goals as dictated by the state's Renewable Energy Standard, and in fact, electricity contributes a relatively small fraction of greenhouse gas emission compared to the entirety of Vermont's energy portfolio. Electricity has emerged as a clean-and-getting-cleaner source of energy. Around the world, that's motivated an interest in switching to electricity for a lot of our energy needs. The Department of Public Service, our regulators, are also touting this.

I do not by any means urge people not to conserve electricity as appropriate, because I do believe efficiency is a key value. The flip side is, we as a society are likely to be using more electricity now than in the past, and we are not only using it more efficiently but also for needs that

replace what we've used fossil fuel energy for.

In my time at WEC, one of the most controversial things I've been part of is modifying the rate design. To members who are concerned that their bills are going up, I've had to say, WEC's policies favored your low monthly use in the past over those who used more, and now our policies are shifting to meet new realities. I'm trying to say that in a straightforward way. The fact is, our 20 year old policy was out of date, and we needed to move from only incentivizing low electric use to incentivizing electricity over fossil fuel. Times have changed, and WEC has to evolve like everyone else. But that won't stop us from continuing to fine-tune our ways of doing it.

Louis: I understand that frustration people feel, Steve, and I know you do too. It's frustrating to be encouraged to do something, and then have that direction be changed, whether that's in your personal life or in your decisions on energy use. We—as a state—haven't done as good a job explaining that pivot in our collective energy policy. The fact of the matter is, as we reduce fossil fuel use in Vermont, people are still going to need to drive to work and heat their houses, and there are limited power sources that can do that. Here at WEC, electricity is a good way to do that. To make that pivot successful, there are things we're going to need to adjust, from the big, like our rate structure, to the small, like what size transformers we're putting out in the field.

Steve: WEC can advise members what we see coming down the road from our position of being involved in the energy business, but we need to be careful about telling people what's good for them to do. I know I'm somewhat cautious of anyone who tells me what I have to do. As you said, Louis, people have their own individual needs and situations and one size does not fit all. We, as a cooperative utility, make policy choices based on the collective good. We have to try to look into the future as best we can, knowing things are always changing and one solution that seems obvious at a particular time may no longer be so obvious years later.



WEC is part of a regulated electrical system, and the cost and revenue challenges we face are not addressed with simple reflexive choices, but result from being part of a region-wide electric system.

— Steve Knowlton

The climate factor

Steve: Vermont recently adopted its first Climate Action Plan. WEC and other utilities have been on this for a number of years. For years, it's been in our mission statement that we distribute electricity to our members in an environmentally conscious way. We've worked to become 100 percent renewable before any policy directed us to. We've been progressing this way for some time, and trying to do it in an equitable way. Now we have a comprehensive energy plan moving us toward this. The Climate Action Plan, coming out of the climate council, comes out of a direction WEC actually participated in for some years already.

Many people over the years have talked the talk, but WEC as a functioning utility has also attempted to walk the walk. That's the way I think about it. We may not be the largest or flashiest utility, we don't have a PR department, but nonetheless we're living up to our mission statement as a reality and not as something that's aspirational. We continue to aspire to do it better and more effectively, but I believe that everyone on the Board is happy with holding to those values.

Louis: All this comes from our members: shifting to be 100 percent renewable, stating clearly they didn't want power from Vermont Yankee. Clearly concerned about climate change and the impact of power generation on climate change. The Board addressed these things for that reason. Our periodic membership surveys bear out those are important values to members of the Co-op beyond having reliable and affordable power supplied to them.

Steve: Coincidentally, we are in the middle of a strategic planning process, and this is an appropriate vehicle for WEC to do strategically. Now that we have our direction more or less set, it's important for us as a community to think about our choices strategically, and Louis has joined us at just the right time to say, "Here's our direction, how do we find ways of implementing it that interlock reasonably and have legs to take us into the future?" Our strategic planning exercise is coming on at an opportune time for both of us. We have new leadership and an impetus on which to follow through.



WEC Office Temporarily Closed to Public

WEC's East Montpelier headquarters is temporarily closed as a precaution during the COVID Omicron variant surge. We apologize for the inconvenience and appreciate members' understanding. Thank you for doing your part to keep our community safe.

What's your internet story?

As WEC works to make high speed internet available to all members, *Co-op Currents* is looking for stories from members about the role broadband—or the lack of it—plays in their lives. Drop us a line at currents@wec.coop.

Members Write

Our Electric Car Experience

By Lauri Scharf

It's been over two years now since we bought an electric car (or EV). It's our first EV, so we weren't sure what to expect, but at this point the verdict is in: we're very satisfied. At the end of the day, living with an EV isn't very different from daily life with a gas car. The vast majority of our trips are to work, for shopping, and to other destinations within a 20-mile radius. That uses a small fraction of the car's battery. When it needs charging, our charger (courtesy of WEC's PowerShift program; more on that later) can top it off in a few hours overnight. We can go to Burlington and back without charging, and on trips to Boston, we stop to charge for 25 minutes in New Hampshire. In winter, the battery range does decrease by maybe a third (my

rough estimate), so those longer trips require more charging time, but our typical daily life is unaffected. A side-benefit to traveling with an EV is that it has more storage space (ours has a "frunk" where the engine would be). Will we go for an extended road trip in it? Not at this point, given our limited time (as working stiffs). But it won't be long before there are enough charging stations that charge super fast. Then it'll be a no-brainer.

Prior to buying this car, we had kept an eye on the EV options, knowing one was in our future, but the ones we looked at had limited range, lacked all-wheel drive, or had small interiors. By 2019, the variety of EVs had expanded and we found a model that met enough of our needs, so we pulled the trigger. The federal tax credit was a big help. We still own

a gas car that owes us nothing, but it spends more time parked in the driveway than our EV does.

Getting set up to charge the car at home was pretty straightforward. WEC's Energy Coach provided us a ChargePoint unit under the PowerShift program, whose goal is to "shift" heavy usage like car charging and hot water

heating to off-peak hours. We just paid an electrician to install it. (WEC put us in touch with the electrician, and his cost was less than half what another electrician quoted us!) Our car starts charging at midnight and is done by 3 or 4 a.m. (depending on how low the battery was to start, and

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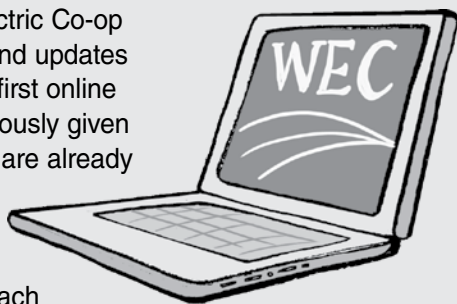
No gallons of gasoline power Lauri Scharf's EV — just 100 percent renewable WEC electricity.



Lauri Scharf charging his electric vehicle at home.

New in 2022: Digital Co-op Currents in your inbox

For the first time, Washington Electric Co-op members can receive Co-op news and updates by email. This issue marks our very first online newsletter. Members who have previously given the Co-op permission to email them are already subscribed. If you haven't received this issue in your inbox, you can subscribe at wec.coop.



A digital newsletter helps WEC reach more members with Co-op news and policy updates. It also allows WEC to contact members quickly with major updates that happen outside the print publication schedule.

At the same time, we won't overcrowd your inbox. Our approach will be to send digital issues at the same time as print issues — eight times a year according to our publication schedule — and reserve other email updates for only the most important and time-sensitive Co-op news stories.

Going forward, *Co-op Currents* will be both a print and online publication. If you prefer to read your news online, you can save the Co-op paper and postage by opting out of the print publication and going digital-only. Change your preferences anytime at wec.coop.

Our aim is to make Co-op news and resources accessible to all members. And please remember — *Co-op Currents* belongs to WEC members. If you have a story idea, or if you'd like to submit a piece for our Members Write section, we would love to hear from you. Contact us anytime at currents@wec.coop.

Visit wec.coop/broadband

- *Is pole inventory happening in my town?*
- *Which CUD will bring broadband access to my neighborhood?*
- *How can I stay up to date on this process?*

Visit wec.coop/broadband to learn where pole inventory and other broadband rollout work is happening, who is doing the work, and how to connect with the Communication Union District (CUD) in your service area.

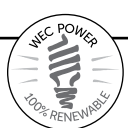
You can also visit these CUD websites:

CVFiber: cvfiber.net

ECFiber: ecfiber.net

NEK Community Broadband:

nekbbroadband.org



How To Lower Your Energy Bills This Winter

by Carol Weston, Efficiency Vermont

Happy New Year to all Washington Electric Cooperative members from Efficiency Vermont. We are grateful for and proud of the strong relationship we have established with in Washington Electric Cooperative and look forward to continuing our work together as we all weather the pandemic related impacts that Vermonters are feeling. We welcome your questions and feedback



Carol Weston, outgoing executive director of Efficiency Vermont

as we work to create easy and helpful ways for you to take steps toward a more efficient and affordable home.

Winters in Vermont are long and cold, and energy costs this time of year can put a strain on your budget. In fact, almost half of your energy bill goes to heating and cooling your home. Efficiency Vermont and WEC are here

costs, keep your home cozier, and lower greenhouse gas emissions. If you are interested in doing an efficiency project this winter, here are some ideas on where to start.

Smart Thermostats

Smart thermostats are a great place to start reducing energy costs. They use sensors and automation to learn your behavior (when you need the temperature in your home higher, or lower) which saves money, energy, and time by automatically adjusting to your habits and the changing weather. Plus, you can get \$100 off the cost from Efficiency Vermont. Learn more at www.encyvermont.com/rebates.

Weatherization

Insulation and air sealing go hand

in hand to save energy and money, in addition to making your space more comfortable. Air sealing is always the first step. The average home has so many air leaks, it's like leaving a window open all winter long. Sealing those up creates a barrier so that cold air won't flow through your insulation materials.

For the greatest impact, complete a comprehensive weatherization project with an Efficiency Excellence Network contractor. You'll get 50 percent off your project costs (up to \$3,000) from Efficiency Vermont, an additional \$600 from WEC, and you can pay for your project monthly with Efficiency Vermont's low or no-interest Home Energy Loan.

If you're not ready to go that route,

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Efficiency Vermont Rebates for Your Home

These offers are available as of January 1, 2022 and are subject to change. Visit www.encyvermont.com/rebates for the most up-to-date information.

Air Sealing and Insulation

Working with an EEN contractor (best value): 50 percent off eligible project costs, up to \$1,000.

Moderate income Vermonters get 50 percent off, up to \$3,000, while funding lasts.

DIY: \$100 back for completing eligible projects, like weatherizing windows and doors, adding storm windows, and sealing air leaks in your attic and basement

Heating, Cooling, and Water Heating

Heat pumps:

Air-to-Water Heat Pumps: \$1,000/ton rebate for qualifying equipment + \$500 income bonus

Ducted: discount starting at \$1,000 at participating distributors + \$200 income bonus

Ductless: discount starting at \$350 at participating distributors + \$200 income bonus

Ground source: up to \$2,100/ton rebate for qualifying equipment + \$500 income bonus

Integrated controls for ductless heat pumps: up to \$600 rebate for qualifying equipment

High-performance circulator pumps: \$15-\$50 discount at participating distributors

Smart thermostats: up to \$100 rebate for select ENERGY STAR models

Water heaters: \$300-\$600 for select heat pump water heaters + \$200 income bonus

Window air conditioners: \$100 rebate for select ENERGY STAR models



Wood pellet furnaces & boilers: \$6,000 rebate

Appliances

Rebates on select ENERGY STAR models:

Clothes Dryers: \$200-\$400

Dehumidifiers: \$25-\$40

Lighting

Discounts on select ENERGY STAR LED fixtures at participating retailers
LEDs for indoor growing: \$100 rebate for qualifying fixtures

Income Assistance

Additional help is available in the form of free appliances, energy audits, insulation and air sealing — call to find out if you are eligible.

New Homes

Three hours of free technical assistance and up to \$4,000 back on your new energy-efficient home.

Do a deep dive on your energy use.

You can often reduce your bills just by taking a look at what systems or appliances waste the most energy. If you're not sure, give us a call. We'll ask you some questions about your home's heating and cooling systems, insulation, lighting, and appliances. This gives us a better picture of where your home may be using more energy than necessary. You can also install a home energy monitor to get real-time data on your home's electrical use, including "Always-On" consumption and individual appliances.

Seal it.

Sometimes, sealing a home's air leaks and improving insulation are all you need to make your house more efficient and comfortable. Stop drafts by sealing gaps and cracks with caulking, weather-strip windows and doors, and fill any large gaps in basement crawl spaces, dryer vents, windows, and foundations.

Find out more at www.encyvermont.com/DIY or work with an Efficiency Excellence Network (EEN) contractor to get up to \$3,000 back.

Upgrade to more efficient appliances and electronics.

When an appliance is at the end of its well-worn life (like a 15-year-old refrigerator), it's time to trade it in for a more energy- and cost-efficient model. We can help you do research—find and compare products at www.encyvermont.com/shop.

Pick the better bulb.

Get the brightness, color, and quality you demand—ENERGY STAR LEDs last up to 15 times longer than incandescent light bulbs. Plus, they are more efficient, generate less heat, and provide the same amount of light.

Not all LEDs are created equally, so make sure you look for the ENERGY STAR logo to find a quality bulb that won't quit.

Turn it off. ALL the way off.

The easiest way to save energy is to turn electronics off when you're not using them. Power them down completely to avoid "phantom electricity loads," or invest in an advanced power strip with technology to cut the power to devices that aren't in use. Visit www.encyvermont.com/APS to learn more.

Income Bonus:

If your annual household income meets the following guidelines, you may be able to receive a bonus rebate:

Number of people in household:	1	2	3	4	5
Annual household income limit: Chittenden, Franklin, Grand Isle counties	\$80,600	\$92,000	\$103,600	\$115,000	\$124,200
Annual household income limit: All other Vermont counties	\$70,600	\$80,800	\$90,800	\$101,000	\$109,000



Lower Your Energy Bills

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Efficiency Vermont also offers a \$100 Do-It-Yourself weatherization rebate, to help offset project costs. To learn more, visit www.encyvermont.com/weatherization.

Ductless Heat Pumps

A heat pump works like a refrigerator, but in reverse. It draws heat from the air outside, condenses it, and then redistributes the warm air into your home. Thanks to innovative advances in this technology, it now works in temperatures as low as -15 degrees F. Heat pumps are powered by electricity, making them more cost effective to operate compared to some fossil fuels, and you can **get up to \$900 off** the cost from WEC and Efficiency Vermont. Plus! In the summer the same system


works as an air conditioning unit. To find out if a heat pump is right for you check out www.encyvermont.com/heatpump.

More on our Home Energy Loan

This is a fast, easy, and flexible way to break down project costs into low monthly payments. For low and moderate-income Vermonters, interest rates start at 0 percent. You can use this loan to finance ducted and ductless heat pump systems, air sealing and insulation projects, solar or heat pump water heaters, central pellet boilers and furnaces, advanced wood and pellet stoves, and select ENERGY STAR appliances.

Why is financing a good idea? Efficiency upgrades will lower your energy bills now, which helps offset your monthly payments. If your energy

savings are substantial, you may even see a decrease in your monthly expenses. Once your loan is paid, you'll continue to enjoy energy savings, lower bills, and a more comfortable home. Not where to start? Schedule a

FREE Virtual Home Energy Visit with an Efficiency Vermont energy expert. Whether you own or rent, they can walk you through your options and help you identify the best ways to save. 

Operations Crew

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Richard Pateta, member service field technician; and Josh Pierce, mechanic.

Gordon Chandler, who moved to Vermont from Georgia, said that while he's still getting used to the weather and terrain, "everyone's been very welcoming." Longtime Construction Foreman Amos Turner added that the new staff bring a welcome mix of skills and personalities. "We've been lucky to get the guys we did," he said. "Rob and Justin come with a

lot of experience from local utilities, and Dylan and Ryan both come from line school in Maine. Josh has been a good asset to the company as mechanic. You couldn't ask for a better worker than Richard. We've been very lucky the last few months."

Turner had a hand in bringing Apprentice Lineworker Ryan Martel to WEC. Martel was unsure of what he wanted to do after high school, so his girlfriend's mother suggested he job shadow with Turner, a family friend. "That was two, three years ago," said Martel. "I liked it. I liked being outdoors, I liked the environment, I liked the crew, I liked the camaraderie, and I applied to line school." He attended line school in Maine, got some experience, and was hired at WEC. "I knew I wanted to be somewhere back here, close to home, and I definitely did like Washington Electric," Martel said. "Guess it all worked out."

Now, team members are working on pole setting and line extensions as WEC works to prepare its grid for broadband rollout and make it more resilient to storms. Kresock is relieved to have hands on deck for pole work and outage restoration. "This last storm, because we just had these new hires start with us, we were able to have another crew out in the field overnight. A lot more cleanup was able to take place with the additional people. It was very helpful," he reported.

One of the main pluses, Kresock noted, is the wide range of experience new crew members bring, and their interest in learning new skills. "Even Dylan and Ryan are working with the construction contractor setting poles. It's very helpful to us especially as broadband picks up. We're going to need that kind of pole setting ability," he said. "We're very happy with the group."



Button Up 2021 Incentives for WEC Members

Thermal Incentives

Weatherization



WEC

- Weatherization improvements to building shell: \$600 for Home Performance with Energy Star contractor

Efficiency Vermont

- Receive 50% of project costs back, up to \$1,000.
- WEC member households may be eligible for 50% of project costs, up to \$3,000; see eligibility, here: <https://www.encyvermont.com/rebates/list/home-performance-with-energy-star>

Heat Pump Incentives

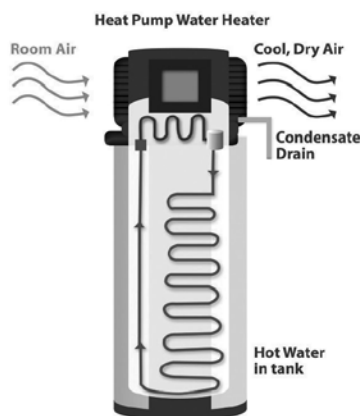
WEC & EVT 2021 Heat Pump (HP) Incentives¹

A qualifying house meets or exceeds minimum thermal standards (VT Residential Energy Code)

	Point of purchase discount ²	WEC bonus incentive ^{3,4}
Ductless - ≤2 tons	\$350	\$250
Ductless - >2 tons	\$450	\$250
Ducted - ≤2 tons	\$1,000	\$250
Ducted - >2-<4 tons	\$1,500	\$250
Ducted - ≥4 tons	\$2,000	\$250

Air to water (A2W) heat pump \$1,000/ton

Ground source heat pump Coming in 2021



- 1 Qualified by Efficiency Vermont
- 2 Point of purchase discount applied; provided by Efficiency Vermont
- 3 HP installed in building meeting/exceeding thermal standards (VT residential energy code)
- 4 Contact WEC for eligibility for bonus incentive

Heat Pump Water Heater (Hybrid) Incentives¹

	Point of purchase discount ²	WEC bonus incentive ⁴
Replacing conventional electric hot water	Up to \$600	-
Replacing fossil-fired hot water system	Up to \$600	\$250

WEC encourages members considering purchase of HPWH to select unit with CTA-2045 communication port, to enable future participation in a Co-op load management program

For the most up to date list of Efficiency Vermont incentives, visit encyvermont.com/rebates.

If you're ready to make some upgrades and want to learn more about all the incentives and financing options available to you, call or email Bill Powell, WEC's Energy Coach: energycoach@wec.coop or 802-224-2329.

Pellet Stoves, Furnaces, and Boilers Incentives



WEC

- \$250 for either a qualifying pellet stove or a wood stove. Stoves must be installed by qualified installer.
- Pellet furnace: \$1,000
- Pellet boiler: \$1,000

Efficiency Vermont*

- Pellet stove: \$200 when installed by qualified contractor
- Pellet furnace or boiler: up to \$6,000

Note: Incentives of over \$600 or more require a completed W-9 form. See <https://www.washingtonelectric.coop/energy-coach-home/>

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

802.224.2329 • energycoach@wec.coop



For World-Renowned Marriage Therapists, High Speed Internet Is a Missing Piece of Business Operations

When Israel and Cathie Helfand moved to Cabot in 1997, it was a conscious choice to bring hands-on homesteading into their daily life, and wilderness into their therapy practice. Using the carpentry skills that put Israel through graduate school, they rehabbed a 1845 farmhouse, built trails and gardens, and reintroduced farm animals, creating a space where visitors could decompress.

Many of their visitors are clients. For couples in trouble, the Helfands offer Marriage Quest, which is widely recognized as one of the top marriage retreats in the world. The Helfands have a high success rate when it comes to marriage repair, and they help to minimize harm for couples who choose to divorce. Couples from all over fly to Vermont and drive to the end of Deeper Ruts Road for a personal, three day intensive session with the Helfands. "They're coming to a farm, as opposed to an office building," explained Cathie. "A lot of the couples we work with have a farming connection, so it's coming home, to a certain extent. It's what you think of when you think of a family farm."

Marriage Quest was closed for the duration of Vermont's pandemic shutdown, but meanwhile, COVID-related stress pushed more



WEC members and therapists Israel and Cathie Helfand run one of the world's top marriage retreats for couples in crisis at their farm in Cabot. But during the pandemic shutdown, videoconference and other online tools weren't available to them without high speed internet.

couples to the point of fracture. And without high speed internet, the Helfands could not offer virtual therapy to people seeking their services. "It would have been another option," mullied Israel. "Even a short conversation with a couple in crisis is helpful to them." Since the Helfands reopened the retreat, their waiting list has only grown. Clients are now welcome at the farm as long as they're vaccinated. "In the last month, we've had California, Ohio, and Pennsylvania," observed Cathie.

The Helfands believe that the unique success of their retreats lies in a few factors that differentiate their approach from traditional models. These include therapy at "warp speed," as Israel put it, focusing on personal growth within the context of the relationship, all taking place in the restorative environment of the farm.

When they moved the practice to Cabot in 1997, most communications infrastructure was still offline. Whether you worked in an office building or on a farm, you made appointments over

the phone, sent paperwork through the mail, and showed up for conferences in person. Almost 25 years later, nearly all of that infrastructure has moved online. Recently, and especially during their retreat's forced closure during 2020, the Helfands have come to believe that high speed internet is a major missing piece in their business operations.


It even affects how they maintain their licenses to practice. "I have to have so many continuing education units, because I'm a state licensed marriage and family therapist," explained Israel. But without high speed internet, he lacks the bandwidth to attend a virtual meeting. So when the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapists sent an email to their members announcing a virtual conference for the second year in a row, he contacted them for a

workaround. "They actually called and said, we're so sorry, we don't have a mechanism for weeding out those who can't attend, because the majority of our membership lives in areas where there is fast internet access," he said.

Now, picturing a future where they could soon offer therapeutic services virtually, the Helfands say yes and no. They've had plenty of time to think about how they would like to use high speed internet when they have access to it. Since the shutdown, they've honed in on the idea of using broadband for an initial meeting with couples interested in their services. "I think the virtual would be really good for the vetting process," said Israel. "As I get older I find I have a little less patience and want to work with couples who are a really good fit. So I'd like to spend a little time talking to them, and broadband would help me do that." As broadband access appears to get closer, the Helfands are also thinking about tutorials and trainings they could develop and share, and how a virtual option would help them follow up with couples after a retreat.

But they both agree that for them, the customized therapeutic experience they offer couples needs to be in person. And that's not necessarily an option for every couple who needs their services.

For those couples, the Helfands have a referral: their son, psychologist David Helfand, who lives in Cabot but maintains an office in St. Johnsbury with high speed internet. When the pandemic shut down Marriage Quest, Israel and Cathie asked him if he would consider offering couples' retreats for those they weren't able to serve. "He's really good at it," said Cathie. "I've sent everyone to him because he's virtual and has fast internet."

For more information: marriagequest.org 

Board of Directors

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March 7. All details are included in the candidate packet.

Members of the Co-op have the right to petition for changes to the Co-op's bylaws. The bylaws are available on wec.coop, or you may contact WEC for a hard copy. To petition for a change, you are required to collect signatures in support from a minimum of 50 WEC members. Petitions for bylaws changes are due February 4.

For the second year, candidates and members petitioning for bylaw changes may gather petition support digitally.

Coming up, candidate biographies in the March issue of *Co-op Currents*, and candidate responses to policy questions in the April issue.

Run for the Board of Directors!

The first deadline is **Feb. 4.**

Contact Rosie today for a candidate packet: 802-224-2322 or rosie.casciero@wec.coop.

No rate increase in January 2022

In 2021, several factors combined to cause significant rate pressure. WEC leadership tries to minimize rate increases, particularly during a pandemic, and were able to stave off a predicted rate increase. No rate increase took effect January 1, 2022.

Visit wec.coop first for outage information

It's winter storm season, and WEC's website now offers complete outage information for our members.

If you are experiencing an outage, check wec.coop first to learn what's happening and what WEC crews are doing about it.

Click the button that says "Outage Center."

Check wec.coop first. If you don't see the information you need, call 802-223-5245 or toll-free 1-800-WEC-5245 to report the outage.

