

March 22, 2018

## Co-op Leadership

### Governor Ralph Northam Visits SVCC's Power Line Worker Training School

Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative CEO John Lee and Southside Electric Cooperative CEO Jeff Edwards led Governor Ralph Northam on a tour of the Virginia Power Line Worker Training School at Southside Virginia Community College in Blackstone on Wednesday, March 14<sup>th</sup>.

Governor Northam was at the Blackstone facility to see firsthand the benefits of the **Workforce Credentialing Grant Program** and discuss issues facing rural Virginia, including broadband deployment and workforce development. **John Lee** presented Governor Northam with a letter, signed by CEOs from all 12 electric cooperatives headquartered in Virginia, pledging unified commitment to collaboratively work on a comprehensive solution to rural Virginia's lack of broadband availability.



Also on hand were **SVCC President Dr. Al Roberts** and **Dr. Meghan Healy**, Virginia's Chief Workforce Development Officer, joined by **Dr. Keith Harkins**, SVCC's VP of Workforce and Continuing Education, and **Mary Jane Elkins** from the SVCC Foundation.

*(L-R) Andrew Vehorn of the VMD Association, SVCC President Dr. Al Roberts, John Lee of MEC, Governor Northam, Jeff Edwards of SEC and Brian Mosier of the VMD Association.*

Now in its third year of operation, this 11-week line worker pre-apprentice program provides graduates with **Level 1 certification from NCCER (the National Center for Construction Education & Research)**, as well as a **commercial driver's license, CPR/First Aid certification and OSHA safety training**. At the recommendation of its advisory committee, the Power Line Worker program recently expanded to include **chainsaw safety**, with training provided by Penn Line.

"We're proud to help launch these young people into a vital career that will enable them to stay in their rural communities," said **Keith Harkins, SVCC VP of Workforce and Continuing Education**. Upcoming classes are scheduled to begin **June 4** and **Sept. 4**, with low-cost, on-site housing available for \$14 to \$16 a night.

For more information about the Power Line Worker Training School, visit <https://southside.edu/events/power-line-worker-training-school> or call SVCC's Susan Early at **(434) 292-3101**.

*-Report by Mary Howell, VMD Association Communications & PR Coordinator.*

## Commitment to Community

### MEC's EMPOWER Project Receives \$2.6 Million TRRC Broadband Grant



At its March 8 meeting, the **Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission (TRRC)** approved Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative's request for a \$2.6 million grant to deploy **135 miles of last-mile fiber broadband** through its subsidiary, **EMPOWER Broadband**. "Last-mile" is the terminology utilized to describe the final leg of a broadband connection from main line fiber to a home or business.

**MEC President and CEO John Lee** noted, "This grant is the culmination of the dedicated efforts of MEC's staff, board of directors, and a number of our area's legislators and citizen members of the TRRC." He added, "We are eager to get EMPOWER Broadband up and running and bringing value to Southside Virginia."

Explaining that the TRRC grant will cover half of **EMPOWER Broadband's \$5.2 million fiber-to-the-premises pilot project**, John recognized Halifax **Mayor Ed Owen**, **Delegate James Edmunds**, **Delegate Tommy Wright**, **Senator Bill Stanley** and several other TRRC members for their support.



"Access to fast, high-capacity broadband is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity. Receiving TRRC grant funding allows us to begin the substantial task of **addressing the digital divide** between Southside Virginia and urban areas, and provide a service that has a proven impact on a region's social and financial health," John added.

MEC is creating a fiber "backbone" to connect its substations from Gretna to Emporia and points in-between. The EMPOWER pilot program, designed to prove surveyed estimates and fine-tune best-practice construction techniques, will enable members within 1,000 feet of this backbone to subscribe for the ultra-high-speed internet. Entry-level service at 50 Megabits per second (Mbps) download and 50 Mbps upload will be offered at a **cost of \$65 to \$75 per month**, including a Wi-Fi-enabled fiber optic router. As the pilot progresses, MEC will also offer Voice over IP telephone service.

The retail fiber-to-the-premises pilot will serve portions of **Brunswick, Charlotte, Greenville, Halifax, Mecklenburg** and **Pittsylvania** counties. Construction is anticipated to be complete before the **36-month period** required by the grant. Upon the successful completion of the pilot, MEC and EMPOWER will evaluate the feasibility of expanding broadband service to the remaining portions of its electric service area and beyond.

In addition to the TRRC grant, MEC and EMPOWER are evaluating additional opportunities for grants, including Federal Communications Commission (FCC) **Connect America Funds**.

The cooperative has already initiated material procurement for portions of its fiber backbone, with the first deployment slated for the **Bracey area of Mecklenburg County** and **Shockoe community of Pittsylvania County**. The retail pilot, offered by EMPOWER Broadband, will be open to members along the route, but MEC sees the opportunity to open service to those in nearby communities with the attainment of future grants. A deployment schedule will be released within the coming weeks as planning continues.

**MEC Board Chairman David Jones** said, "It is unacceptable that to complete their homework assignments and have access to the unlimited educational resources available through the internet, students in many of the areas we serve must go to a library or sit in a restaurant that offers Wi-Fi. Our families deserve more... and when it is financially feasible... MEC is compelled to provide it."

*-Report by Debbie Blue Winn, MEC Member and Public Relations Specialist.*

### Co-op Honors

## VMD Member System Communicators Earn Numerous 'Spotlight' Awards



Springtime is **award season** in co-op land, with staff at **Choptank, Rappahannock** and **Delaware** electric cooperatives, as well as the **VMD Association**, recently recognized as part of **NRECA's Spotlight on Excellence Program**. In the **Best Total Communication Program**

category, **Choptank's Debbie Rementer** and **Beth Gertsch** earned a **Silver Award** for their **SmartHub Campaign 2017**.

REC's member newsletter, *Powerlines*, won a Gold Award in the **Best Internal News Publication** category, while **REC communicators** also earned a Silver Award in the **Best Graphic Design** category for "Green Together," their electric vehicle wrap, as well as a Silver Award in the **Best Digital Storytelling** category for "The Power of Change: F.R.O.G."

In the **Best Individual Ad** category, **DEC's Jeremy Tucker** and **Teresa McCann** won a Gold Award for their Capital Credits Spot and a Silver Award for *Delaware Living*, their annual magazine produced with the help of Association Production Manager **Janet Bailey**.

Rounding out this year's Spotlight Award recipients, *Cooperative Living* Field Editor **Laura Emery** won a **Best Feature Story** Silver Award for "Spreading Kindness, One Rock at a Time," while **President & CEO Richard Johnstone** earned a Silver Award in the **Best Column** category for his Viewpoint column, "Planting Trees."

Congratulations to all of these cooperative communicators for their exceptional creative efforts!

*-Report by Mary Howell, VMD Association Communications & PR Coordinator.*

## Co-op Education

### Congratulations to MEC'S Greg Hicks!

On March 15<sup>th</sup>, **Greg Hicks** from **Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative** completed his **VMDAEC Contemporary Leadership & Management (CLM) Program Level II** certification! Greg received his Level I certification in 2013 after completing six leadership workshops. In order to receive his Level II certification, Greg continued the program and completed his 15<sup>th</sup> workshop this past March 15.

At a celebration for Greg's accomplishment, **Brian Mosier**, **VP of Member & Governmental Relations** at the **Association**, and **Sam Bruce**, facilitator of the workshops, presented Greg with his **Level II certificate**. Brian offered thanks to Greg's manager, **Jeff Howerton**, and to **Mecklenburg CEO, John Lee**, for supporting the CLM program and Greg's development.



*(L-R) Sam Bruce, CLM Facilitator, Greg Hicks of MEC, Brian Mosier of the VMD Association.*

The 2018 workshop and conference schedule is posted on the Association website, but it's never too late to make a request. Any employee who needs *continuing education credits* or has an idea or topic for a class, should contact **Brandon Burton**, VMD Association Director of Continuing Education, at [bburton@vmdaec.com](mailto:bburton@vmdaec.com), or (804) 968-7153. The Association takes requests and can even bring training to individual member systems!

#### **Here's what is coming up:**

- ★ **April 2-30:** [Power Line Design & Staking, Level 1](#) – Online class
- ★ **April 23:** [April Director Education Day](#) – *BLC 944.1 Giving & Receiving Effective Feedback* – Richmond Omni
- ★ **May 1-3:** [Engineering & Operations Conference](#) – Hilton VA Beach Oceanfront
- ★ **May 18:** [Contemporary Leadership & Management Workshop](#) – *Time Management* – VMDAEC Headquarters.

“Continuous personal and professional development is your key to the future.” Brian Tracy (American motivational speaker)

*-Report by Brandon Burton, VMD Association Director of Continuing Education.*

## Co-op People

### Casey Hollins Named Director of Communications & Public Relations for REC



*Casey Hollins*

**Casey Hollins** was recently promoted to **director of communications and public relations for Rappahannock Electric Cooperative (REC)**, headquartered in Fredericksburg. She succeeds **Ann Lewis**, who has transitioned to a different position within the co-op.

In her new role, Casey leads REC's communications and public relations department, which facilitates the cooperative's **internal and external communications, digital and social media, public and media relations, and school and community involvement** programs.

Prior to assuming her new position, Casey served as REC's **communications specialist** for **nearly 10 years**. Congratulations to Casey!

## Personals

### News About Members of the VMD Cooperative Family

We are sad to report the passing of long-time **Delaware Electric Cooperative Director Howard Clendaniel**, who had served on the board for 22 years, including eight years as chairman. There will be a viewing at Crossroad Community Church tomorrow, on **Friday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>** from 10:00 a.m.-12:00 noon. The funeral service will be held at 12:00 noon. The church is located at 20684 State Forest Road, Georgetown, DE. Condolences may be sent to his widow, **Deborah**, at P.O. Box 445, Georgetown, DE 19947.

## Help Us Keep You Informed!



If you have story ideas, news or information of interest and benefit to other members of the electric cooperative community in our three-state area, please contact

**Mary Howell** at [mhowell@vmdaec.com](mailto:mhowell@vmdaec.com) (804) 968-4070 or

**Phyllis Long** at [plong@vmdaec.com](mailto:plong@vmdaec.com) (804) 968-4077.

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