

WEC CO-OP CURRENTS

'A Christmas Carol' In Co-op Land

It took three phone calls to their home in Cabot to rouse Cathie and Scott out of bed. They had just turned in a few hours before, and while no visions of sugar plums danced in their heads, it was Christmas Eve (technically, this being 2 a.m. it was Christmas morning) and they'd been looking forward to a long winter's nap. Scott's sons Tom and Nick, 22 and 16, were in nearby rooms, everyone anticipating a leisurely morning of gifts, and later, dinner at Cathie's mother's house down the road.

The two earlier calls had come from WEC Line Foreman Tim Pudvah, who had been awoken by Rinkers Communications, the Co-op's answering service, around 1 a.m. and told that outage calls were accumulating. Strong winds had built up in the night and trees were being toppled into the power lines. Tim, in East Montpelier, phoned Operations Director Dan Weston in Calais, and they decided a company-wide response was in order; their reasoning – that dawn would bring Christmas and people would want to have warm houses and baked goods fresh out of the oven, lights for their trees and electricity for their new toys and gadgets.

So Tim woke Lineman Larry Brassard in Barre and Dan tried a third time – this time successfully – to rouse Cathie and Scott. Cathie Vandenburg is a seasoned

dispatcher, intimate with Washington Electric's computerized outage-management system; and WEC stock keeper Scott Martino is an adept assistant and would help Cathie with communications among the field staff.

"Dan wanted everyone to come in," said Cathie. "He said, 'Let's get everybody's power back on for Christmas as soon as possible, and then get our people back home to be with their families.' We were all in it together."

Meanwhile, Dan had continued making calls and crews were forming up out in the wind and darkness of Christmas morning.

Cathie and Scott left a note for the boys, arriving at the Co-op at 2:35 a.m. They turned on the computers and checked the system for emergencies,

getting oriented to the storm and discovering what outage information Rinkers had already logged in. Meanwhile, Dan had continued making calls, and two-man line crews were forming up out in the wind and darkness, along with ground personnel to scout the system by truck and snowshoe looking for broken wires, trees leaning on the lines, tripped fuses and other trouble. Cathie let Rinkers know they would take over, and she and Scott began reaching workers on their cellular phones, finding out where people were so they could coordinate a response. The phones rang as more WEC members called to report their outages; the speakers crackled with the remote conversations of linemen

continued on page 8



Cathie Vandenburg, above, at her outage-dispatch terminal. Cathie interrupted her Christmas Eve sleep to guide repair efforts, with assistance from WEC Stock Keeper Scott Martino, from 2:30 a.m. to noon Christmas day.

Cold Weather And Electric Power

Rural Vermonters dread losing their power in the winter time. A home can get cold fast at 20 degrees below zero – the kind of temperatures that visited central Vermont in mid-January – with no electricity to switch on your furnace or boiler when the thermostat demands it. A backup power supply and/or a secondary heat source like a wood stove is a good idea for health, safety, and peace of mind.

But cold weather itself isn't usually a threat to rural power. The major threats come from wind, ice, and wet, heavy snow, which can topple trees

across the lines. When it's very cold, snow is apt to be lighter and less dangerous to the power lines.

Yet there are risks to electric power posed by very cold weather. And since in some cases you – the Co-op member – can help avoid these risks, it's good for you to know about them.

Your transformer

Providing you with the right-sized transformer is Washington Electric Co-op's job. If you're attached to the Co-op's system by an above-ground

continued on page 6

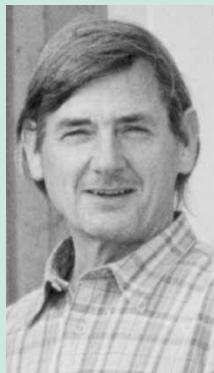
Washington Electric Cooperative
East Montpelier, VT 05651

Inside

Your Co-op Wants YOU! The time is approaching for WEC voters to elect four members to the Co-op's Board of Directors, and energy issues have never been more important. To learn about running, and consider taking that step yourself, see article on page 7.

'Change' is in the air, but will it be enough, and will they be the right changes? WEC's board president and general manager reflect on political and energy-related issues in their reports on page 2 and page 3.

The Fab Four: WEC's Member Services Department, who may be your most direct contact at the Co-op, is profiled on page 4.



Field Technician Mike Patterson was one of 24 Co-op employees called out to work in the wee hours of Christmas morning. WEC's Board of Directors thanked them with a formal resolution of appreciation. Page 5.

'Baby, it's cold outside.' WEC needs your help to make sure it doesn't get cold inside, too. Be mindful of your electricity use. Our "Cold Weather" story continues on page 6.

President's Report

Time Now To Invest In Our Future

By Barry Bernstein

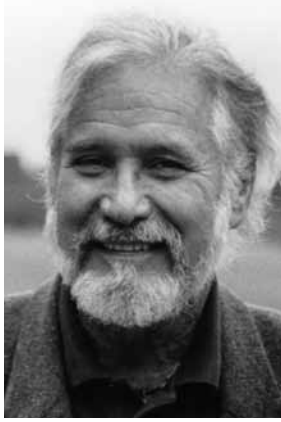
To Our Co-op Employees

Very early on Thursday, December 25, Christmas Day, due to high winds, WEC employees were called into the office and out into the cold to restore power to more than 1,000 Co-op members' homes that were without electricity (see "A Christmas Carol," page 1). By noon WEC employees were able to begin to go home, I am sure a bit tired, and catch a delayed Christmas with their own families. The WEC Board of Directors passed a resolution at our January 7, 2009, board meeting (see page 5). We wanted to show our appreciation, recognition, and thanks to our dedicated WEC employees, on behalf of the board and our members.

Again: THANKS.

Troubled times/Leadership opportunities

We are in strange times, difficult times, transition times – and in this new



year I felt I wanted to share my thoughts with you, our membership, straying from my usual focus on issues directly concerning electricity and WEC operations. I emphasize that these are my own thoughts and are not meant to reflect the WEC board's positions; but since public issues require public discussion, and our WEC households are deeply affected by the current situation, I wanted to express them in this column.

State of affairs – Unavoidable reality

I just returned from Washington, D.C., where more than 2 million people watched the swearing in of our 44th U.S. President. More than 38 million people in the United States watched it on TV, and many millions more via the internet and around the world joined us in viewing this occasion. Regardless of one's politics, I know almost everyone wishes our new president the best and hopes he is successful in addressing the many complex and difficult challenges ahead of us.

The news upon my return continues to be sobering, with reports of economic conditions worsening as 2009 begins. The cumulative job losses for 2008 make it the worst in 45 years. The unemployment rate reached a 15-year high at 7.2 percent (increasing to 13.5 percent if the underemployed are included), a level not seen in 25 years. Consumer confidence, consumer spending, business confidence, home builder confidence, and confidence in financial markets are all at record lows.

The reports are a constant reminder of what faces us, highlighting the fact that we are all in this boat together and need to all be part of the solutions. I have felt the impact in my own business and life, and most everyone else I talk with is experiencing the effects of this severe economic downturn. Vermont is less insulated from what is going on outside our borders than before. As our governor and our Legislature debate the course of action we will take, I feel compelled to share my reflections, believing that we all need to be engaged in the discussion and the decisions taken.

It is a time for us to move forward, and in doing so we must invest in our future, not abandon it. We must share in paying for it. However, it is critical that we do this without gutting services to those in most need. We must abandon the rhetoric that locks us in and prohibits us from taking the bold steps necessary to secure hope for better times. We must use this time to grasp the opportunities available to us.

Instead of bickering, we need action, including:

1) Rainy Day Fund – Many of us felt the recession before the experts used the "R" word, and many of our fellow Vermonters are feeling the affects more deeply than others. For these folks the "D" word (Depression) has already seeped into their lives. It is time for the governor and the Legislature to use these funds to address this crisis. If our current circumstances don't meet the qualifications for a "rainy day," what does?

2) Tax surcharge on higher income

In 1991, two political powerhouses, Republican Governor Richard Snelling and Democrat Ralph Wright, the Speaker of the House – normally bitter rivals – were able to put partisanship aside and reach agreement on a tax surcharge, with a sunset clause based on the economy recovering. It was a bipartisan agreement struck for the benefit of the state and not for political advantage of individuals. Governor Snelling, a firm opponent of any new taxes, had the courage to grasp an opportunity, literally walking down to the speaker's office with his proposal for the surcharge.

It seems reasonable that those of us who are fortunate not to have to worry about staying warm and having enough to eat would be willing to contribute an extra measure during these trying times. It is time for Governor Douglas to seize an opportunity and

meet with newly elected Speaker Shap Smith and support the enactment of an income surcharge. Increased revenue streams must be part of the solution.

3) Road and bridge repair & upkeep

– We all know that if too little salt and sand is put on the roads when we have icy conditions, it can leave some of us headed for the snow bank at best, or perhaps for the hospital or worse. It seems there is movement in Montpelier toward acknowledging that everyone benefits from heavily investing in needed repairs of transportation infrastructure – which also has the benefit of creating work and jobs.

That's why it is my feeling that an increase in the state gas tax, pegged to inflation, is long overdue; it seizes another opportunity to invest in our future. An increase in the price of gas, especially given that a gallon of gas is 50 percent less than six months ago, invested in repair of our roads and bridges is far less expensive than the replacement of tires and shocks, and towing costs from hitting pot holes on poorly maintained infrastructure – not factoring in the safety of our families. Everyone who uses the roads – tourists and Vermonters alike – needs to share in the costs and benefits.

4) The electric (and communication) highway

– We all rely on, pay for, and often take for granted the transmission and distribution infrastructure that delivers electricity – a basic necessity – to our homes and businesses. This infrastructure is now also carrying much of our cable access and will increasingly be an access for our fiber-optic network. At Washington Electric Co-op, our members own our infrastructure, and as a cooperative – a quasi-public, not-for-profit entity – WEC has access to lower-cost capital. Experience elsewhere has demonstrated that this model is affective on a larger scale.

That's why it is time to create a Public Power Authority, with the power to invest in and help finance renewable power projects, in public-private partnerships that lower the operating costs and the bills to our businesses and homes. The days of price manipulation of our wholesale power markets in Vermont and New England by a relatively small number of powerful corporations must come to the end.

It's also time to consider restructuring and reorganizing VELCO, the owner of our in-state transmission structure, into a public power-transmission company, to reap the benefits of lower-cost capital that would result from public ownership of these critical resources. VELCO does operate responsibly and has worked cooperatively with WEC's staff on many issues, which we appreciate. But it is critical now to take advantage of all cost savings on behalf of the public, individuals, and businesses. Public ownership and investment in

continued on page 6

Co-op Currents

Co-op Currents (Publication No. USPS 711 -210 and ISSN No. 0746-8784) is published monthly except February, May, August and November by Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., Route 14, P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, Vermont 05651. The cost of this publication is \$.45, which is included in the basic monthly charge to each member. Periodical postage rates paid at East Montpelier and at additional offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Co-op Currents*, P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, Vermont 05651.



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

Board of Directors

President	BARRY BERNSTEIN (May 2010)	1237 Bliss Road, Marshfield, Vt. 05658 Bbearvt@aol.com	456-8843
Vice President	ROGER FOX (May 2009)	2067 Bayley-Hazen Rd., East Hardwick, Vt. 05836-9873 rfox@pivot.net	563-2321
Treasurer	ANDREA COLNES (May 2009)	918 Jacobs Road, East Montpelier, Vt. 05602 alc@sover.net	223-8474
	DONALD DOUGLAS (May 2011)	21 Douglas Rd., East Orange, Vt. 05086 dondougl@gmail.com	439-5364
	KIMBERLY CHENEY (May 2010)	143 S. Bear Swamp Rd., Middlesex, Vt. 05602 kcheney@cbs-law.com	223-3181
	ROY FOLSOM (May 2010)	2603 US Rt. 2, Cabot, Vt. 05647 RoyGrnsy@aol.com	426-3579
	DAVID MAGIDA (May 2011)	632 Center Road, Middlesex 05602 vtmagida@aol.com	223-8672
Secretary	MARION MILNE (May 2009)	1705 E. Orange Rd., W. Topsham, Vt. 05086 milne@tops-tele.com	439-5404
	RICHARD RUBIN (May 2009)	3496 East Hill Rd., Plainfield, Vt. 05667 rrubin@sover.net	454-8542

AVRAM PATT
General Manager
avram.patt@washingtonelectric.coop

WILL LINDNER
Editor
Willind@aol.com

TIM NEWCOMB
Layout

Editorial Committee

Avram Patt Donald Douglas David Magida Will Lindner

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 Deborah Brown, 802-223-5245.

Manager's Report

'Change' Indeed Shaping Up In Washington And Montpelier

By Avram Patt

There's a new president and Congress in Washington, the Vermont Legislature is in session in Montpelier, and unpredictable and worrisome economic conditions are affecting all of us. With all of this change before us, I wanted to give WEC members a brief overview



government do need to recognize that using less energy to get the same work done will make a big difference, no matter what the price at the gas pump (or the electric meter) is today or a few years from now.

In Washington

As a result of the

November 4th election, we are going to see some big changes at the federal level concerning energy. Even before any legislation passes, it is clear that energy efficiency and new energy sources are central to President Obama's plans, as evidenced by his key appointments. The new secretary of energy, Stephen Chu, is a Nobel Prize-winning physicist and a recognized leader in promoting scientific solutions to climate change and clean energy sources. Lisa Jackson, the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and Carol Browner, the new assistant to the president for energy and climate change, both have very strong credentials and history in this area.

An appointment that affects rural electric co-ops specifically is former Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack, the incoming secretary of agriculture, and we can expect that the USDA Rural Utilities Service will increasingly focus on renewable energy development in addition to providing ongoing financing for our poles and wires. Vermonters should also note that Congressman Peter Welch is now a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, joining the committee's new chair, Rep. Henry Waxman, a strong proponent of alternative energy and climate change legislation.

Congress and the administration will, over the next year or so, work on some very significant energy-related legislation, and although it is too soon to start guessing what the final bills will look like, it is clear that significant actions will be taken. First off, the economic stimulus package is expected to contain significant support for energy efficiency work, since that is an area where the technology already exists, where work can start and jobs can be created quickly. The stimulus package will also support renewables development and possibly some infrastructure improvements that will be needed to transmit new forms of generation from new places.

While an economic stimulus package will pass quickly, we will see more significant and longer-term legislation developed and funding mechanisms created to promote renewable energy generation of all kinds, research and

development of new technology, energy efficiency for electric, thermal and transportation uses, and reduction in carbon emissions. There will be both carrots and sticks, and I think the overall message will be: "Let's get to work, and no excuses."

Can we really change things?

Can we really overhaul our entire energy system and dramatically reduce our use of fossil fuels and polluting or dangerous energy sources over the course of the next 20 years or so? Can government initiatives actually work when we've gotten so cynical about government?

I think skepticism is a healthy thing, but so is optimism. Although it was a different time and a different set of energy problems that we faced, there is a shining example in our nation's history of what can be accomplished in a short time when there is the will, the commitment, and some practical optimism.

As late as the 1930s, more than 60 percent of the land mass of the United States, including parts of Vermont, did not have any electric service. There was not enough money to be made serving rural America, and so no lines were built and electric generating plants mostly served the more populated areas. Without any further initiative, that was the way things would have continued.

One of the greatest and most-lasting successes of the New Deal era was the economic stimulus program called "Rural Electrification." With federal financial support, structure and guidance, the infrastructure that now serves most of the nation's land mass was built by local cooperatives, and large hydroelectric dams were built in some parts of the country. (WEC's own small hydro plant at Wrightsville had a similar origin. The dam itself was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933-1935, as a flood-control dam in response to the great 1927 flood. WEC developed the hydroelectricity component in the 1980s.)

The enormous and far-flung rural electric infrastructure was built out across the country over a very short span of time – and it's still serving us. It's an example of what a combination of public support, competent local organization, and pioneering spirit can accomplish in building a different energy future.

In Montpelier

Although the economy, revenue shortfalls, and the state budget will dominate the current session, the Vermont Legislature will be considering some important energy issues too. The November 4th election did not bring dramatic changes to our state

government or the Legislature. In the energy area, one change of note is that WEC member Rep. Tony Klein of East Montpelier is now the Chair of the House Natural Resources and Energy Committee, one of the committees I testify in from time to time representing the Co-op. Two other legislators from WEC's area continue as chairs of committees that deal with utility and energy issues as well: Montpelier State Rep. Warren Kitzmiller at the House Commerce Committee and Washington County State Sen. Ann Cummings at the Senate Finance Committee.


The energy issue making the most news this session is the relicensing of the Vermont Yankee nuclear plant, which requires legislative action according to Vermont law. WEC stopped taking VY power in 2002 and will not be taking power if the plant does get relicensed to operate after 2012. However, some other Vermont utilities are keenly interested in the outcome of this issue.

Another topic in the early stages of discussion is the Douglas Administration's proposal for creating "green growth zones." This would allow towns to vote to create special areas targeted for development of renewable energy generation and/or district heating systems; for those zones to be able to raise special tax revenues to finance such development; and to be eligible for other benefits or incentives. The purpose is to encourage communities to host such projects.

From WEC's perspective, we would of course generally support measures that encourage local renewable development, but we'll also be looking at the proposal from the rural perspective to make sure that this is something that small towns and their residents can benefit from as well.

For a future report

Over the past few months I've spent time surfing the web and blogging with alternative energy advocates and experts around the country and beyond, getting a sense of all of the different types of alternative technologies being developed or imagined. As a utility manager, I sometimes play the role of skeptic in these discussions when someone claims that some unproven technology is ready to go. Most bright ideas for new energy sources prove not to be feasible – but some do, and what seems like a pie-in-the-sky concept today might be a breakthrough that really helps change the energy picture. Some of the technologies are relatively down-to-earth and others seem like they're out of science fiction movies (e.g. solar collectors in space), but who can tell?

In a future issue of *Co-op Currents*, I will summarize some of these possible energy sources of the future. But in the meantime, if you're the web-surfing and blogging type and would like to check some of these sites out, please contact me at the WEC office or by email. 

What's with the price of gas and fuels?

In 2008, we saw some of those most dramatic changes in retail energy prices imaginable, both up and down. First, we experienced frightening increases in the cost of fuels that we depend on for heat, for manufacturing of goods, and for transportation. With prices for gas or heating oil rising above \$4/gallon, many households were suddenly paying hundreds of dollars more per month for basic needs, and these high energy costs were affecting the price of food and all other goods and services as well.

And then the meltdown and collapse of the financial sector happened even more quickly, and we learned that we were in a recession (that had actually been going on for some time). Fuel prices plummeted to levels we had not seen in a few years.

Now they have crept up a bit again but will probably remain relatively low in the immediate future. But here's my prediction, and I'm certainly not the only one saying this: Energy prices will be going up over the longer term, because despite the bubbles, spikes, crashes, and irrational behavior of "the markets," the fundamental truth is that our traditional energy sources continue to get scarcer and more costly to produce. So energy efficiency and conservation remain the wisest first investment, whether we're talking about our personal finances or public dollars, and whether we're talking about electricity, home heating, hot water and cooking, our businesses and places of employment, or transportation.

During the recent election campaign, candidate Barack Obama was ridiculed in some quarters for saying that if everyone in the country had a tire gauge and kept their tires inflated and their cars tuned properly, we could save more oil than could be drilled for offshore. Fortunately, a number of non-political experts pointed out that he was basically right. Tire gauges will not solve the global energy crisis or reverse climate change, but we and our

KNOW YOUR CO-OP

A Department Called 'Member Services'

It seems funny that WEC should have a "Member Services Department," since there's very little the Co-op does that isn't some form of member service. The entire 40-employee organization is geared toward serving members – meaning, essentially, keeping their power on. If WEC were a for-profit utility its service personnel would therefore be called Customer Service Representatives. The title "Member Services Representative" conveys the heightened sense of responsibility the company owes toward those who are literally the Co-op's owners.

Three WEC employees answer to that title – although they say they have renamed their department "The Bold and the Beautiful." They are Shawna Foran, Elaine Gonier, and Beth Hodgkins, and if you call the Co-op for any reason, or come in to pay your electric bill in person or inquire about some aspect of the Co-op's operations, you're most likely to get assistance first from one of those three. The fourth member of the Member Services team is Supervisor Susan Golden.

"Primarily, our department is responsible for billing and all that goes into that," says Golden.

While the staff does not actually print the bills and mail them (WEC contracts with a cooperatively owned billing company in St. Louis for those services), Shawna, Beth, Susan, and Elaine do all the preparation that leads up to the bills – such as compiling the results of more than 10,000 meter readings monthly – and then all the follow-up work. They process those 10,000-plus payments,

field a myriad of questions from Co-op members about their bills, and coordinate with other WEC departments when people move onto or off of the Co-op's lines.

Then there are the storms. In a major weather event that causes numerous outages, it's often Beth, Susan, Elaine, or Shawna you reach when you call the Co-op at 11 p.m. or 2 a.m. to report that you've lost power.

"Outages are an organization-wide concern," Golden explains. "Everyone, from all departments, participates during major outages. We try to make

sure someone is here to take members' calls and receive their information rather than passing them on to the answering service. In the year and a half I've been here I've worked a couple of overnights; the same goes for the other Member Services Representatives."

While the members of this department have overlapping experience and are able to help each other out, each has unique areas of responsibility. Here's a look at how Member Services divides the load, and who does what.

Shawna Foran

Shawna came to Washington Electric in June 2002. Her desk is at the front of the room at WEC's East Montpelier office, so chances are if you pay your bill in person it's Shawna who will greet you and take your payment. Shawna is the main cashier.

She also handles transfers, meaning that when a member moves out of the Co-op's service territory or a new member moves in Shawna handles the termination or the opening of the account. There can be a deposit requirement when new members begin service; the deposit is a sum based on the history of electrical usage at that home, or a projection of usage for a new dwelling. The requirement can be waived if a prospective member can

Beth keeps an eye out for unusually high electricity usage, which can indicate a problem in a member's home; the sooner it's caught the less of the member's money is wasted.



Shawna Foran

provide a good credit reference; for those unable to do so WEC will spread the deposit over three installments to make it manageable. There is also a one-time \$20 membership fee for all members.

As WEC's cashier and primary manager of account transfers, Shawna handles these details for the Co-op. And as the face at the front of the office, and frequently the first voice on the telephone, she is to some degree the face of Washington Electric Cooperative, a responsibility she handles well and with good humor.



Washington Electric's Member Services Department handles every facet of billing, and much more besides – including welcoming callers and visitors at the Co-op's office. They are, from left, Member Services Representative Elaine Gonier; Senior Member Services Representative Beth Hodgkins; Member Services Supervisor Susan Golden; and Member Services Representative Shawna Foran.

Beth Hodgkins

Beth is WEC's Senior Member Services Representative, with a commensurate array of duties. One of her responsibilities is downloading and processing the meter readings brought back to the Co-op by its five meter readers. But Beth, who came to WEC in 1999, also keeps an eye out for inconsistencies such as unusually high electricity usage at a member's home or business. It could indicate an electrical problem or unintended usage (a space heater accidentally left running, for example), and the sooner it's caught the less of the member's money is wasted. If Beth spots a



Beth Hodgkins

questionable reading she will contact the member to ask about it.

Beth also tries to help members who are in financial difficulty avoid disconnections. The Co-op has obligations to its membership to keep the company solvent, and cannot ignore unpaid bills. But disconnection is a last resort, and it will often be Beth who tries to work out payment arrangements to help people catch up gradually with their overdue bills. WEC has alternatives to standard monthly billing, such as budget billing which evens out a member's bill over 12 months and avoids spikes in winter (or summer) payments. All the Member Services Representatives know about the billing programs and can answer your questions. But the first step in that process could be talking to Beth.

Elaine Gonier

Elaine, who joined WEC's staff in 2002, has some of the same responsibilities as Shawna. She is WEC's backup cashier, and also processes the forms and paperwork involved in getting new members connected to the Co-op's power lines.

Those duties put Elaine in a good position to handle special responsibilities and work closely with the Operations Department. The engineers generate substantial office work as they design new connections and changes in the Co-op's infrastructure. They handle the technical aspects and



Elaine Gonier

documentation of those alterations – but at the point where their work overlaps with Member Services it's likely to be Elaine who carries the ball. When the construction projects entail rights-of-way through member-owned or publicly owned property, it requires filing easements with town clerks – and there are 41 different towns in WEC's service territory. Elaine takes on those jobs.

There are also duties that all three Member Services Representatives share, including working out solutions to inactive accounts – circumstances (fortunately rare) when people move away without notifying the Co-op or closing out their accounts. These situations represent a problem for Washington Electric, which tries to recover payments. Field workers (linemen, technicians, and engineers) do the on-site work of disconnecting the meters, and back at the office, the Member Services Representatives monitor these problem accounts and close them out when they reach a resolution.

Susan Golden

The Member Services Supervisor is actually the newest member of

the team. Susan came to WEC in July 2007, bringing extensive administrative experience with local credit unions. She does some direct member service work, like the rest of her staff, but her impact has largely been one of identifying ways to improve the Co-op's efficiency in terms of billing and collections. Working with

the Board and management, Susan has researched and instituted several functional improvements in her relatively brief time at Washington Electric.

One such improvement was cycle billing, which the Co-op initiated last winter. Surpassing 10,000 accounts, WEC had grown too large for the old system of billing all members at the same time. Cycle billing spreads the process out over the course of a month, making everyone's job – from the meter readers to the cashiers – more manageable. It was an important transition for a growing, high-profile utility.

Another change in Susan's billing department is accepting credit card payments. WEC will not, and cannot, automatically bill a member's credit account; the transaction must be

originated by the member each month, which he or she can do by phone or online. (Members should know that the credit card companies charge a fee for the service; it is not WEC's fee.) Golden says that credit card payment has become increasingly popular with WEC members.


"A good sign, though, is that a lot of people are using debit cards, not credit," she adds. "Which means they're not incurring new debt and interest; they're doing it strictly for the convenience."

More recently, Susan provided leadership as WEC adopted electronic check processing, a change in handling members' payments that is getting underway this winter. Co-op Currents advised members of the change in the December 2008 issue, because it's important for them to know that their payments will be submitted more quickly to their banks for clearance. Electronic processing uses technology that is becoming more common at stores and other businesses; its benefit is greater efficiency for the Co-op, finalizing those transactions in a fraction of the time, and providing a better electronic record of payments – which can be useful to both the Co-op and its members.

All these changes are examples



Susan Golden

of the Member Services Department keeping up with the times, adopting modern billing and financial practices. Yet as they do so, Elaine, Beth, Susan, and Shawna try to remember the "Member" in Member Services, and treat Washington Electric's member/owners with the respect they deserve – especially at midnight during a winter storm. 



Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc.

P.O. Box 8, 75 Vermont Route 14N
East Montpelier, Vermont 05651

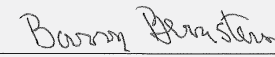
Telephone: 802-223-5245; Fax: 802-223-6780
www.washingtonelectric.coop

RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF WASHINGTON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE THANKING STAFF FOR WORKING CHRISTMAS DAY 2008

BE IT RESOLVED: That the board of directors of Washington Electric Cooperative, at their Thursday, January 8, 2009, board meeting, unanimously voted to extend appreciation and heartfelt thanks to all of the Washington Electric Cooperative employees who on Thursday, December 25, 2008, Christmas Day, worked from early morning to restore power to nearly 1,000 Co-op members' homes so they could enjoy Christmas day with their families.

The board further recognizes that this effort on the part of our employees kept them delayed from enjoying Christmas day with their own families. We are grateful as are the Co-op membership for your continued commitment and dedication on behalf of our membership.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of the Cooperative this 8th day of January, 2009.

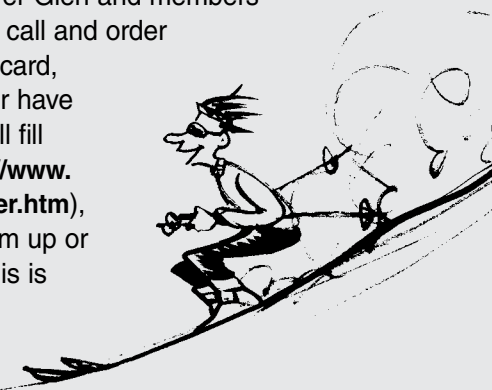

Barry Bernstein, President

Now, Call WEC for Mad River Glen Tickets

The geese have flown south, the temperatures have plunged, and ski season is coming! This year the Co-op has an improved deal for WEC members who ski at Mad River Glen – which is also a cooperative. You can now purchase day passes at the Co-op office. The ticket price varies depending on the day; weekday adult tickets are \$35.

WEC is a ticket retailer for Mad River Glen and members are eligible for special prices. You can call and order tickets by phone, paying with a credit card, then either pick your tickets up here or have us put them in the mail. The Co-op will fill orders placed from the website (<http://www.washingtonco-op.com/pages/madriver.htm>), but members must still either pick them up or have them mailed to your address. This is not an electronic ticket offer.

See you on the mountain!



Cold Weather

continued from page 1

connection, the transformer is a large metal cylinder, usually mounted near the top of a power pole close to your house; your service wire connects to the transformer on one end and your house on the other. Transformers reduce the voltage so that the power you receive is appropriate and safe.

"When a member goes onto our system we size their transformer based on their expected electrical load," explains WEC Operations Director Dan Weston.

But that doesn't mean that WEC provides a transformer large enough to power every piece of electrical equipment in the house at once – because that's not how people live. Rarely if ever are all the lights on, the electric dryer and water heater running, computers, TVs and sound systems, ranges and heating plants and washing machines and bass guitar amplifiers and tropical fish tanks and ... well, you get the point ... all being used at the same time.

Like all electric utilities, the Co-op applies a "diversity factor," which calculates that in certain settings (a very large house, a very small house, a store or business, an industry, etc.) a certain percentage of the potential electric load can be expected to operate at peak times of usage. And it sizes the transformer appropriately.

But here's where cold weather comes in. Over a long period of time residents will often add additional electrical equipment. They might change from a gas stove or dryer or water heater to an electric one; they might buy an electric freezer, or add extra televisions or computers; perhaps someone takes up welding in the garage. While our homes are generally served by transformers large enough to accommodate these additions, there could come a point when the margin of extra capacity is no longer adequate. Then, under circumstances of unusually heavy electric usage, the fuse inside the transformer burns and the power goes off.

When is that most likely to happen? "On the coldest night of the year," says Weston. "Cold weather puts people inside more. It's dark longer in the winter and people are in rooms with the lights on and entertainment systems running. They're doing their laundry, running their dishwasher – all the things they normally do, but doing them more. And then it gets below zero and the heating system comes on repeatedly, and it could blow a fuse."

This does not happen often. And WEC tries to guard against such circumstances by monitoring the volume of people's electrical usage as noted on the meter reading.

"Here in the office we're liable to spot a sharp increase in usage if it's over a short period of time," Weston says. "But if it's a very gradual build-up, over months or years, it's less likely we'll



A snow-covered WEC transformer, amidst snow-covered branches. It's important that the transformer be sized correctly for your needs, especially when the thermometer plummets – so consider whether your electrical demand has increased over the years.

notice."

WEC will respond immediately if someone reports a power outage. "We're on call twenty-four/seven," Weston says, "and we're going to be out there if we're needed, even on the coldest night of the year."

But if you've been at the same residence or business location for a long time, it wouldn't be a bad idea to reflect on the changes you've made that could result in significantly more electrical demand. If you've kept your WEC bill stubs you'll find a record of your kilowatt-hour (kWh) usage,

enabling you to compare. And if your monthly bills show a wide variation in usage (for example, an average of 10 kWh/day during one billing period and 50 kWh/day in another) you could be a candidate for a transformer change.

To follow up on these issues, give WEC a call and our Member Service Representatives will get you to the right person. Twenty-below-zero is a lousy time to lose power, and you might spare yourself the agony.

Underground service

Another potential but avoidable cause of power loss – sometimes under cold-weather conditions – pertains mostly to members with underground service connections. Yet the source of this problem is above ground, just beneath the meter mounted on the pedestals placed at underground-service locations.

"There's a wire that goes down into the ground and into the home," says Weston, "and that wire is almost always aluminum. It attaches to a breaker switch under the meter. Aluminum expands and contracts in hot and cold weather, and over time the connection at the breaker switch can become loosened."

Usually the effect isn't a complete loss of power, but a flickering due to the poor (but not broken) connection at the breaker terminal. Or it could be built-up

corrosion at that same spot. "We'll sometimes have people calling in to report that they only have half their power, and it's because one leg of the 240-volt system is not operating," Weston explains.

And there's a wrinkle here: this outdoor breaker switch (which looks the same as the breakers in your electric-distribution panel) is located below the meter – that is, on the *home side of the meter* – and is therefore the property of the homeowner.

You're not on your own. If you've been experiencing inconsistent power, which is most obvious by flickering lights, call the Co-op and our Operations personnel will help diagnose the problem. "We may refer you to an electrician if we think it's on the homeowner's side of the meter," says Weston. "Most important, though, is we'll help you figure it out and avoid power reduction on one of those brutally cold nights."

Underground service has become more prevalent on the Co-op's electric system; in fact, Weston estimates that nearly 50 percent of WEC members, including all mobile homes, use external breaker systems.

Cold conductors

The first two examples of how extremely cold weather can affect your

power involved ways homeowners can spot a potential problem and work with the Co-op to head it off. But frigid temperatures can also cause a problem you're unlikely to see because it's out there on the power lines. In the midst of a cold snap, a conductor (primary electric wire) might contract to the point that the wire simply separates. This is most likely to happen where the wire

has been spliced, but it can happen to an intact line, too.

Power lines are designed to sag as they run from pole to pole – not too much, for a number of reasons including their tendency to slacken during summer heat, but enough to prevent them from becoming overly taut in freezing weather. "You have to allow for a certain amount of expansion and contraction both," says Weston.


But age, weather, maintenance, and changing conditions can alter the sag.

"If, over the years, some repairs have been made

the tension could have increased," says Weston. "And now come temperatures of 25 or 30 degrees below zero and that wire shrinks considerably, to the point that it can overcome the tension rating in the wire and the wire can simply part, or a splice can let go."

This is a rare occurrence, but in fact it happened on a WEC line this past December, causing a number of outages. Even rarer was what happened to Green Mountain Power Corp. in Worcester on January 16, when the power lines grew so taut in cold weather that they snapped an aged utility pole (the company had set new poles on the route, not yet in use, and was able to move the wires quickly to one of the replacement poles).

WEC understands and prepares for the effects of tough Vermont winters. We monitor and inspect our systems to minimize disruptions. But you can help us serve you even better. We're in the midst of Vermont's annual deep freeze right now, and in the coldest of weather (especially) monitoring your power usage – and heeding peak alerts when they are broadcast – can reduce your risk of an outage.

The Co-op will do its best to take it from there. 



President's Report

continued from page 2

generation and transmission infrastructure is operating successfully in many parts of the country. For decades, the dominant myth has been that corporate business can run all things more efficiently and effectively for the citizens of our country. But the recent and continuing collapse of much of our economy puts an end to that dogma. The rampant greed and self-interest that has been demonstrated calls for changes in the way we do business.

The next several years are not going to be easy, and we can and should trim

some things. But being penny wise and pound foolish is not going to be the answer. Gutting our infrastructure to the bone will not serve us well. When Vermont receives the federal stimulus money it will need to be supplemented with state resources, and with bold leadership that is driven not by fear but by molding the opportunities into tools to be used wisely.

This will take a new consciousness from everyone participating in the process. The times of excesses are over, as are the times of limited vision. We all must learn to view things from a fresh perspective, because what we've been doing clearly hasn't worked. Together, we can do better.

Think Now About Running For The Board

Deadlines Approaching For Candidates, Bylaw Changes

Washington Electric Cooperative will hold its 70th Annual Membership Meeting on Tuesday, May 12, 2009. The venue will be the Barre Elks Club on Jefferson Street in Barre, behind the Aldrich Public Library. The Co-op will be returning to the Barre Elks for the fourth consecutive year.

With the Annual Meeting date now set, it's time to encourage Co-op members to think about running for a position on WEC's nine-member Board of Directors. Directors customarily are elected to three-year terms, and each year three board seats expire. The incumbents who hold those seats can run for re-election if they choose to – but the process is equally open to qualified challengers. "Qualified" doesn't mean people who are experts

in the field of electric utilities; it basically means Co-op members in good standing. The best qualification is an interest in serving on the board of an important community institution – the 70-year-old consumer-owned, not-for-profit utility that provides electric power to some 10,000 rural homes, farms, schools and businesses in 41 towns in central Vermont.

In 2009 there will also be an election for a fourth board position. This is due to the loss of veteran board member Wendell Cilley, who lost his life in an unfortunate accident in September 2008. Following WEC's bylaws, the Board of Directors appointed an interim replacement for Wendell in December, who will serve until the Membership Meeting in May. The voters will then elect someone to finish the last two

years of Wendell's term. The bylaws allow the interim director, Andrea Colnes of East Montpelier, to be a candidate if she chooses.

WEC board members serve at-large, rather than representing districts. In the elections this year the three candidates who receive the most votes will serve the three-year terms presently expiring, while the candidate with the fourth-highest vote total will complete Wendell Cilley's term. (Wendell was last elected in 2008.) WEC's leadership encourages competitive races – more candidates than board seats available – because like all democratic institutions Washington Electric Cooperative functions best when more members vote and participate. In 2008 a first-time candidate unseated an incumbent, revealing the WEC elections are a truly

democratic process.

Any Co-op member interested in running for the board should contact Administrative Assistant Deborah Brown at Washington Electric, and she will send out a packet of information that includes the petition and other materials needed to become a candidate. The completed petitions must contain the signatures of at least 25 WEC members, and will be due on Friday, February 27, 2009. The next deadline for candidates will be Friday, March 6, when they are asked to provide a photo and a brief biographical statement to be published in the March issue of Co-op Currents. The statement should explain how long they have been Co-op members, what their professional experiences and interests are, what

continued on page 8

WEC CO-OP STORE

WHOLE HOUSE SURGE PROTECTION

Protect individual appliances, valuable equipment with a meter-based SURGE DEVICE. Be Safe, Not Sorry! Special Member Discounts!



A Full Line of "Plug & Play" (DIY installation) Surge Devices

Panamax MAX 2 SPECIALS!

Highest protection, compact size. Three models, all in stock. Offer good through March 2009.



Product	List price	Member discount price
Max2	\$39.95	\$32.95 (save \$7.00)
Max2 Coax	\$49.95	\$34.95 (save \$15.00)

If you own a single item such as a TV, a VCR, a computer connected to the internet by a cable or satellite provider, audio equipment or pay TV service, without surge protection you'll have to make up the replacement cost out of pocket in the event of a surge striking. Full protection, and an iron-clad warranty for all connected equipment.

Your equipment is exposed to power surges until you connect your equipment to one of the Panamax heavy-duty Max2 family of products. Be safe, not sorry!

Home Performance with



HOME PERFORMANCE WITH ENERGY STAR

ENERGY STAR® is a fee-for-service program designed to improve home comfort, durability, health & safety and to reduce homeowners' energy costs.

Services provided as part of a Home Assessment?

- A comprehensive home audit, which may include an evaluation of your heating system, lighting, appliances, windows, building tightness and insulation effectiveness (blower door test, infra-red/thermal scan test)
- Professional advice on ways to improve the comfort and durability of your home, as well as to solve problems and lower your energy bills
- Assistance in prioritizing improvements
- Information on energy-saving products

Contact the Co-op (1-800-932-5245) or Efficiency Vermont (1-888-921-5990) for more information on Home Performance with ENERGY STAR®

Co-op Long Distance Telephone Service

- 6.9 cents per minute (outside VT)**
- 9.9 cents per minute (within VT)
- \$0.99 monthly service charge
- No gimmicks

Billed by Powernet Global. Call to sign up today: 1-866-216-0332, or www.washingtonelectric.coop/pages/phone.htm or call the co-op with questions: 1-800-932-5245.



Call the Co-op at 800-932-5245 or visit us on the web at: www.washingtonelectric.coop/pages/prod.htm

A Christmas Carol

continued from page 1

and ground personnel.

The hours passed and a dim light arose in the east. Thinking back on it a few weeks later, Cathie realized she had never changed out of her pajamas.

Truffles for their troubles

Elsewhere in Cabot, 10-year-old Eli Hale and his little brother Gage, 7, were too excited to sleep. It was Christmas! Somehow they managed to wait until about 4:30 a.m., then they woke their parents, Libby and David, and the family gathered in the living room where the boys launched into their stockings.

"It was way too early!" Libby recalled. But getting the stockings out of the way bought the parents a little more time, so they went back to bed with the radio playing Christmas music. Suddenly, though, the radio went silent, and Libby and David realized their power had gone out. Knowing it's important for people to report their outages, they phoned the Co-op around 5 a.m.

"It turned out that they knew about it and were going to be sending people over," says Libby. "The person was so nice on the phone. They always are."

That would have been Cathie Vandenburg.

A little while later the Hales were sitting in the kitchen when through their window they saw two men trek across the lower field and disappear into the woods on snowshoes.

Going to a different window, they saw a WEC truck parked outside and knew the men were responding to their outage report.

"As we were preparing breakfast we saw them trooping out of the woods again," says Libby. Eli and Gage, feeling the Christmas spirit, wanted to invite them in to eat; the parents reminded the boys that other people were out of power, too, and the men had work to do.

But the family wanted to say thank you in some tangible way to these men who had left their own homes on Christmas morning to help them, so Libby quickly looked around and found some truffles she could give them – "Not exactly the right thing for morning," she confessed, "but that's what I had available, and they were in little boxes with bows."

She carried them out to greet Mike Patterson and Brad Nutbrown as they returned to their truck.

"We just wanted to show our appreciation," Libby said. "They do an amazing job. Please let them know we said so."

As it happens, Mike and Brad aren't linemen and are not authorized to work with electricity. Mike is a field technician whose job is to design extensions to WEC's electric system or renovations when a section of power line is to be moved and rebuilt. Brad is the Co-op's mechanic; most of his time is spent in WEC's cavernous garage, surrounded by oversized truck and heavy-equipment



Cathie being Cathie.

parts, sockets and wrenches, oils, rags, and cleaning solvents. But in times of need, Brad, Mike, and everyone else in Operations is on call to assist the linemen, either by helping them out at repair sites or doing reconnaissance under directions by the dispatcher. That morning their work took them to a system-map location called Cabot 166B – near the Hales' property on Churchill Road.

"We were troubleshooting the line," Mike recalls. "We found a tree had come down on the line, a softwood tree out of the right-of-way that had grown and gotten top-heavy."

Their report enabled the Hales' power to be restored by around 8:30. Mike and Brad moved on, and by late morning most problems had been resolved and they were told they could go home.

"The whole family was gathering at our house," said Mike, who lives in Middlesex, "probably 12 or so relatives. I got back around one o'clock, and they had waited for me for presents."

Asked if he'd received any terrific gifts this year, Mike – ordinarily no softy – said, "Yeah. I think I got my best present at Cabot 166B. That kind of kindness... as I get older I find that it means a lot to me."

"My family knows what I do," he continued. "We just had a job to do, to get the lines fixed. People can't have Christmas Day without power."

Happy endings

There were lots of stories this year about the Christmas that began, for some 1,271 Co-op members, without electricity. The worst-hit areas were in the northern part of the service territory, mostly Cabot, Walden and Woodbury; in and around Middlesex; and southeast in Corinth. The most people out of power at any one time was around 600, between 3 a.m. and 5:30 a.m. The last restoration was completed at 12:01 p.m. on Christmas Day (although Tim Pudvah and Larry Brassard had to go back out again in mid-afternoon for one more service call).

Yet WEC's staff and their families took it in stride. Technician Steve Hart, who lives in Groton, woke the kids up early to open presents before he left.

"They're nine and five years old," says Steve. "They couldn't have waited, and I didn't know when I was going to get back. The wind was howling."

Brian Wilkin, also a technician who would be scouting the lines that morning, hastily finished assembling a drum set for one of his daughters, who


are in the fifth and eighth grade. By the time he returned the drums had been moved to her bedroom – indicating that they had been found to work maybe a little too well.

WEC's newest lineman, Amos Turner, traveled the greatest distance. Amos lives in Barton, where until recently he worked for the municipal electricity. But it was all hands on deck, and Amos was no exception.

When outages hit, said Cathie, "It doesn't matter what's going on. It could be any time of day, we could be in the middle of a construction project, we could be in union negotiations... But those are the occasions when WEC employees pull together to assist the members and each other."

Their selfless efforts did not go unnoticed by the Board of Directors, who met in January and authorized WEC President Barry Bernstein to send each of the employees a letter of appreciation (see page 5).

Christmas was half over when Cathie and Scott got back home and Cathie finally got out of her pajamas. With Tom and Nick, they went to her mother's for dinner and had a nice holiday after all (their stocking ritual is reportedly pretty intense), but the long hours caught up with Cathie and she was in bed by 7.

And this time she got to sleep through the night, the best Christmas present of all. 

Think Now About Running For The Board

continued from page 7

skills they think they can bring to the board, and how WEC members can contact them. (Details for these deadlines and requirements will be provided personally to the candidates.)

The final deadline is Wednesday, March 25, when candidates will need to submit written answers to a short set of questions relating to Washington Electric Co-op. These will be published in April's "Annual Meeting" issue of Co-op Currents – the issue preceding the meeting itself.

These steps require some thought and effort, and signal a candidate's willingness to work and participate while on the board.

What they do not require is specialized knowledge about co-ops or utilities; service on the board is, itself, a learning experience. There has never been a more important time to participate in decisions relating to energy, which now have statewide implications. Interested members are urged to consider service on their Co-op's Board of Directors.

Bylaws petitions due sooner

Washington Electric Cooperative is governed by a set of bylaws – the legally binding rules the Co-op lives by. The annual election process provides members an opportunity to amend those bylaws.

You don't need to be a lawyer to draft an amendment proposal. However, you do need to know whether the subject that interests you is addressed in the current bylaws, and what those provisions are. You can obtain a copy of WEC's bylaws by contacting Debbie Brown at the Co-op's office in East Montpelier.

Along with your bylaw amendment proposal you need to submit a petition for its adoption with the signatures of at least 50 Co-op members (the petition form can be obtained from the Co-op's office). These materials are due on or before Tuesday, February 10, 2009. That doesn't leave a lot of time this year, so you'll need to act quickly. Co-op Currents will publish your amendment proposal just as it does when amendments are proposed by the Board of Directors. Approval or rejection of bylaw amendments is decided by a simple majority of votes.

Members may cast their ballots for Board of Director candidates and for bylaw changes by mail prior to the Annual Meeting, or at the meeting itself.

*Like all democratic institutions
Washington Electric
Cooperative functions
best when more
members vote and
participate.*