

WEC CO-OP CURRENTS

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The newsletter of Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., East Montpelier, Vermont.

June/July 2001

WEC Throws The Switch On New Moretown Substation

It's not hard to tell the old from the new at the site of Washington Electric Cooperative's Moretown substation. You don't need to know a generator from a transformer to see that the Co-op has taken a qualitative leap forward with the new facility. The day after the substation was energized on July 10, Engineering and Operations Director Dan Weston said it constituted a major step toward improving service and power quality for the 1,200-plus Co-op members, in several communities, who are served by the Moretown sub.

Chiefly, though, it displaces an aged, damaged facility that was unsafe to work in and growing more decrepit all the time.

As you face the Co-op's property on Hathaway Road, the original substation is still visible on your left. It consists of a set of old wooden poles, some of them spliced and patched back together after a fire in 1996. Connected to the poles and crosspieces are the usual utility paraphernalia – power lines, fuses and insulators, and a series of tall metal transformers that step down the power from transmission-level to distribution-level voltage.

You'd think, by looking at the spare,

antiquated structure, that the Co-op had been using it, without significant upgrade, for nearly 40 years. And you'd be right.

Next to it, however, is WEC's spanking-new substation, constructed this spring by the Co-op's own operations staff after site-preparation work was contracted out last summer. Working under Foreman Bob Fair, the crew (with personnel varying depending on customer needs elsewhere) spent nearly every day there from early May until July 10, when the new substation was activated and the old sub was idled, once and for all.

The new facility sits on a bed of chipped stone, surrounded by a gleaming cyclone fence. Its poles and crosspieces, reminiscent of an Erector Set, are steel. And all the electric equipment, from the transformers to the new generation of voltage regulators, is designed to provide Co-op members not only with reliable power but a more consistent level of power (which is what is meant by "power quality").

Every detail of the new station meets modern codes and safety standards, and

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A busy morning, as WEC operations personnel prepare the Co-op's new Moretown substation for its July 10 start-up. Camel's Hump provides the scenery.

Members Dine On Full Plate Of Co-op Issues Amendments Pass, Future Discussed At WEC Annual Meeting

For a moment, WEC President Barry Bernstein's comment took everyone aback.

Addressing a roomful of Co-op members, employees and guests as the business portion of Washington Electric Cooperative's 62nd Annual Meeting got underway after a hearty dinner, Bernstein was discussing the central role that energy conservation plays in WEC programs,

planning and philosophy. He had noted, for example, that the Co-op's demand-side management (DSM) efforts had paid off, saving an average of 600 kilowatt hours (kWh) per-member per-year; and said that with a decade of DSM outreach now behind it WEC had served some 80 percent of its membership with home

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Inside

Rate stability, Vermont Yankee, green power, and more, as coverage of WEC's 62nd Annual Membership Meeting continues on page 7.

'Co-op Store,' a new feature in Co-op Currents, debuts on page 6. This month, visit the store for advice on surge protection and UPS equipment.

WEC will stay 'old-fashioned' in some respects, but will have to do it without Janice Cochran. Co-op's telephone voice rings off. Page 8.

WEC President Barry Bernstein, with praise for Karen Kitmiller. Page 2.



Family connections at the Annual Meeting. Elsie Cilley of West Topsham has been a Co-op member for 46 years. Her son Wendell, right, serves on WEC's Board of Directors.

Washington Electric Cooperative
East Montpelier, VT 05651

President's Message

Costly Reminder of Winter; And A Friend of Co-ops Passes On

By Barry Bernstein

I hope all WEC members are enjoying this summer after a beautiful and very snowy winter.

Usually at this time I focus on summer chores, not thinking too much of the past winter or the next. There's time enough later for that. This year, however, the winter remains much in my mind and in the minds of other board members, as we review revenues and expenses from the first six months of the year. It's all part of our budgeting process for the Co-op.

In the winter months of 2001 we incurred our highest storm-related expenses ever, due to the succession of snow storms that lasted from January into April. Fortunately, it looks like we may still be able to stay on-budget, thanks to some unexpected refunds in our wholesale power costs.



On another subject, I would like to take time this month to pay tribute to a fellow central Vermonter who recently passed away after several years of struggling with cancer. State Rep. Karen Kitzmiller of Montpelier was not a WEC member, but she was dedicated to co-ops and to community.

I first met Karen when we were both officers of the Hunger Mountain Food Cooperative in Montpelier, long before she became a state representative. Her tireless commitment to, and on behalf of, others in our central Vermont community, and her consistent positive spirit will be greatly missed in our community and at the Legislature.

Karen
Kitzmiller



The Times Argus

Co-op Currents

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Board of Trustees			
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AVRAM PATT
General Manager
Avram@Washingtonco-op.com

WILL LINDNER
Editor
Willind@aol.com

TIM NEWCOMB
Layout

Editorial Committee

Avram Patt Donald Douglas Wendell Cilley Will Lindner

The Board of Trustees' 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, contact Management and Programs Administrator Denise Jacques, 802-223-5245.

Right-Of Way Reclearing Projects Scheduled

Affected Members with 'Special Trees' Should Call the Co-op

For the Period Through September 2001:

The Co-op will continue working to improve service reliability by reclearing power-line rights of way in the areas described below. Right-of-way reclearing normally involves removing trees and pruning vegetation for 15 feet on either side of a single-phase distribution line, and for 25 feet on either side of a three-phase main distribution line. Except where noted, all of these projects involve single-phase lines, those carried by poles without cross-bars. Reclearing projects often involve a tap. That's where a single-phase line takes power from another line.

Throughout the year, post cards are mailed to members notifying them that right-of-way maintenance is to take place. Also, WEC's automated message-delivery system will place a phone call (if a phone number is on file) to all households affected by such maintenance projects, up to two or three weeks before work on the property is to begin. Calls will be placed in the evening, when most members are likely to be home. If no one answers, Co-op staff will attempt to reach that member during the day.

Because the evening calls are automated, they cannot hold the line if, for example, a child answers. If you believe you may have received a call from WEC, please call during office hours to check. If you are notified that a portion of your property is to be recleared and you especially hope to save any particular trees that are within the right-of-way, call the Co-op.

The Co-op's Right-of-way Management Coordinator Mike Myers, also a forester, will be happy to talk with you about any problems.

Barre	Tap from Miller Hill to Apple Hill Estates and Snowbridge Road
Barre/Orange	3-phase line along Cutler Corners Road
Calais	Tap to Anne Lynn (CS 54-J)
Chelsea	O'Donnell Road tap from Route 113 to end of O'Donnell Road
Corinth	Higher Ground Road tap to June Ginand (CO 104-R)
Corinth	Tap to Kip Gendron (CO-52-18-3)
Marshfield	Beaver Meadow Road tap to Judith Sargent (MAR 61)
Plainfield	Lines along or near Fowler, Gray, Spruce Mountain, East Hill, and the Brook Road
Plainfield	Tap from junction of Maple Hill and Pigeon Pond Roads to Margaret Christie (PL 53P)
Roxbury	Tap from end of Winch Hill Road at Charles Loudon (RO 101N) to Bull Run Road at Selby Jones (RO 76A 1)
Ryegate	Tap to Carwin Page (RY 53-J)
Tunbridge	Tap along Drew/Hoyt Hill Road to Fred Tuttle (TU 103)
Williamstown	Route 14 tap to Palmer Martin (WIL 162)

Members Write

Co-op Currents welcomes letters to the editor that address any aspect of the Co-op's policies and operations, or any matters related to electricity. Readers can write to *Co-op Currents*, P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651. Letters to the editor will not be published in the Annual Meeting (April) issue.

Appreciative of Conservation Ethic

To The Editor:

I confess that I don't always read the *Co-op Currents* from cover to cover; the press of time and my lack of expertise on utility matters often combine to make me skip lightly through the newspaper.

But I am incredibly grateful to have taken the time to read Avram Patt's Manager's Report in the March issue ("Energy Supply Very Much At Issue These Days"). His articulate, concise and accessible presentation about energy-source planning for the Co-op illuminated the issues superbly.

My real praise, though, is directed to the substance: the long-term view, the commitment to conservation and stewardship, and the prudent concern for members were evident.

Thank you to Avram and the Board of Directors for serving us so well.

Ellen David Friedman
(Co-op member for about 25 years)
East Montpelier

Annual Meeting

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energy audits or related conservation programming.

"Our Co-op," said Bernstein, "was not only one of the first in the state, but one of the first in the country, to aggressively provide energy audits for its members in an effort to reduce electricity usage and lower people's electric bills."

And then, inadvertently, the board president dropped his bombshell.

"Our vice president, however, doesn't seem to think that saving energy is worth it," he said.

There was a moment of awkward silence as people looked at each other. Fortunately, Treasurer Don Douglas piped up from the Board table beside the podium.

"He means Dick Cheney, not Roger Fox," Douglas said, and laughter swept the hall. Bernstein laughed, too, and Co-op Vice President Roger Fox – a longtime supporter of WEC's conservation services – grinned self-consciously from his chair.

Bernstein's criticism of the Bush Administration's energy policies (which are considered largely to reflect the thinking of Vice President Cheney), followed Douglas' annual Treasurer's Report, in which Douglas had informed his audience that 2000 had been a good year financially for the Co-op. So good, in fact, that Washington Electric closed the year with margins (revenue over expenses) of \$430,000.

"This is a co-op," Douglas said, "so you can't call it a profit. In any case, it was more than we anticipated." (The margins mean that 2000 will go into the ledger as a year with a surplus, which will benefit WEC members' capital credit accounts.)

One reason for the revenue surplus was generally agreeable weather in 2000, which spared WEC the high costs of repeated system repairs following storms – the situation the Co-op ran into, headlong, as soon as the calendar changed to 2001.

Another reason for higher revenue was growth.

"About 176 new members came onto our lines this past year, and we anticipate continued growth in the Co-op," Douglas said.

It's unclear whether WEC members are consuming more power, per household, than in recent years, but the generally strong economy through much of 2000 might encourage people to do so. In answer to a member's question about the nature of new energy usage, Douglas pointed to modern electronics – computers, printers, and TVs that consume constant "phantom power" with the instant-on feature. It's also possible, said General Manager Avram Patt, that an increase in commercial accounts, generally small businesses that consume marginally more electricity than most homes, might



Co-op members (from left) Wilmer Brandt and Sal and Margaret Lucenti at Washington Electric's Annual Meeting. Margaret Lucenti is a former WEC Trustee.

be pushing usage upwards.

"The main driver, however, is that we simply have more accounts," said Patt.

Bernstein then underscored WEC's commitment to encouraging conservation. "We still have one of the lowest electricity-usage rates per consumer of any utility in the state," said the president. "And it's not by accident. It's the result of a lot of hard work."

But the best economic news came when Bernstein said that because of WEC's financial soundness, "We hope not to even have to consider a rate increase until at least 2003, and maybe beyond that."

Votes tallied

Washington Electric Cooperative held its 62nd Annual Membership Meeting on May 8 at the Elks Lodge in Montpelier. It

attracted a typical-sized crowd of about 140 people.

After the customary dinner and neighborly conversation, Bernstein called the meeting to order and welcomed a number of guests. He introduced State Sen. Bill Doyle, R-Wash., CEO Steven Post of the Vermont State Employees Credit Union, and Vermont Electric Co-op directors Robert Northrup, Jack Slagle and Rod West. Also rising to be recognized were former WEC Trustees Frederick Ladue, Gene Parent, Margaret Lucenti and Dan Wing.

Early in the proceedings, as they do each year, the president and general manager presented service awards to staff members who had reached employment milestones. This year the employees who were recognized included Director of Products and Services Bill

Powell and warehouse Stock Keeper Scott Martino (both 10 years), and Patt himself (five years). The dean of this year's class was Lineman Dennis Bador, a Co-op mainstay.

"After 30 years, Dennis is still out there climbing poles," said Patt, referring to a recent *Co-op Currents* photo of Bador struggling through waist-deep snow. "And we're all better off for it."

Certain matters were decided early, as soon as the votes cast at the meeting were added to the votes collected by mail. Bernstein read off the results of the four-way contest for new three-year terms on WEC's board. Incumbents Monique Hayden of Williamstown (828 votes), Carla Payne of Cabot (680 votes) and Bernstein himself (East Calais, 801 votes) were re-elected. The fourth candidate, running for a board seat for the first time, was Raymond Morton of Peacham. He received 481 votes.

Although Morton was not elected, Bernstein applauded his effort and his interest.

"I want to thank Ray for running and for being involved with the Co-op," said Bernstein.

The other election results pertained to important votes on a set of bylaw amendments and amendments to the Co-op's Articles of Incorporation. The proposed amendments were drafted by the board and staff under the guidance of legal counsel Jerome Diamond of Montpelier. Their thrust was largely to bring Washington Electric Cooperative into harmony and compliance with Vermont's newly revised (in 2000) statute governing electric co-ops.

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Ray Morton, right, a candidate for the Co-op's Board of Directors, chats with board member Monique Hayden before sitting down to dinner.

Moretown Substation

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the old, inefficient transformers have been replaced by low-energy-loss transformers – the better to contain WEC's power costs and conserve electricity.

Some functions of the new equipment can be remotely controlled by computer, which will enable staff to troubleshoot many problems from WEC's dispatch center in East Montpelier, reducing down time and labor costs. The three-phase power lines that connect the sub to poles leading off toward Middlesex, Duxbury and the Mad River Valley are buried underground, improving the appearance of the substation and protecting the lines from storm damage.

Yes, Virginia, an electric substation can be a beautiful thing.

Teamwork

Completion of the new Moretown sub came a little more than a year after the Co-op's membership approved the project at the 2000 Annual Meeting by a vote of 1,128-168. Weston said the Moretown facility – one of eight substations owned by the Co-op – had deteriorated to the point that it was not only operationally deficient but presented potential safety concerns for the Co-op's personnel.

Given that it was WEC's linemen and operators who would run the new substation, Weston decided that they should also do the actual construction. That way, he was sure the Co-op would get superior results. When the project was completed Weston said he had been right.

"I am very proud of the team effort that went into this," he said. "The pride that the guys exhibited in their workmanship was a real pleasure for me to see. It seemed like the diversity of strengths and skills of all the individuals came together, and the work went pretty much flawlessly. That goes for the linemen, the engineers and every member of our operations team.

"Mark Maloney (a Co-op lineman) has a background as an industrial electrician, and he performed all the bending of the copper buss. You can't make a mistake on that; it costs \$15 a foot, and we had hundreds of feet to install. Mark's work was terrific."

Weston also praised Fair, the foreman of the crew.

"He is a detail man, to the point really of fussiness. He takes great pride and

At right, lineman Mark Maloney (right) measures a section of conduit for the new substation before making a cut, assisted by apprentice Larry Gilbert. Below, Gilbert climbs a ladder, wrench in pocket, to take another measurement.



caution in attending to all the details, and that became a characteristic of this job for all the men.

"Steve Anderson (WEC's safety and environmental coordinator) has a lot of experience working with mechanical drawings and design. This project would have been extremely difficult without his expertise. Gene Manning... well, people

always say that farmers make the best linemen, and he is a great example. Farmers are used to improvising. Gene was really good at fixing the little details that the design engineers didn't

catch.

"(Linemen) Ed Schunk and George Brett have that experience, solidity and knowledge that they bring to the work.

"The trouble with mentioning names," Weston concluded, "is I should mention everyone. Because everybody out there was very serious, very involved and professional about this project from beginning to end. And it really paid off."

All systems 'go'

WEC members who are connected to the Moretown substation were notified in

advance of two planned outages preparatory to the sub coming on line. On Tuesday, June 26, the system was shut down for three hours while Green Mountain Power Corp., which transports electricity to WEC's substation, reconfigured its transmission lines to match the new connections.

And on Tuesday, June 10, the Co-op staged a two-hour outage for hitching up the new system, testing it, and finally energizing the substation. The facility provides power to more than 1,200 homes, farms and businesses, includ-

ing some of the Co-op's biggest power consumers (Harwood Union and Rumney Elementary schools, the State Records Building, a state police barracks in Middlesex and a Verizon service center). Weston knew that the outages were an inconvenience.

"People weren't happy about it," he said, "but I think people understood why we needed to shut down, and that it will benefit them to have this new substation and the related work we're going to be performing in that area."

That work consists of upgrades to the power lines linking the Moretown sub to members in Middlesex, and addressing other needs (conductors from the substation also extend to Duxbury, Moretown, Fayston and Waitsfield). People there can expect to see WEC's trucks frequently this summer as the crews undertake these aspects of the work plan.

"It's a well-thought-out, integrated plan," Weston said. "You fix the sub and then you build out from there until you've removed all the weak links from the system. We're not there yet, but we're going in the right direction. And the substation is an enormous piece of that effort."

Plans pan out

When the Co-op's membership voted its approval, construction costs were projected to be \$306,000 – plus other costs related to actually supplying the new sub. The money had been obtained through the federal Rural Utilities Service as part of an approved four-year work plan, and payments on the loan were already struc-

tured into WEC's budget, so building the substation did not necessitate a rate increase for members. Still, Vermont law governing co-ops required their

approval.

Costs for the completed project ended up about 5 percent above the estimate. But given modest inflation during the time that lapsed between design and actual construction, and changes in excavation costs and the price of equipment, Weston considered the project to have come in essentially on-budget.

Originally, WEC had hoped to build and deploy the substation in March. But the storms that hit Vermont from January through April kept WEC's crews busy with outages and other emergencies. The site was plowed clear and readied in February, but that turned out to be wishful thinking.

"The site work was finished last year, and we set the big power transformers in place in November," project coordinator Steve Anderson recalled. "The structural steel was delivered in February, but the crews were too busy to put any time in out there. In early May we were finally able to get going, and they've worked there ever since, just about every day."

The final step will be to dismantle the old station and cart the debris and most of the outdated equipment away.

You'd think, by looking at the antiquated old structure, that the Co-op had been using it for decades. And you'd be right.

Yes, Virginia, an electric substation can be a beautiful thing.



Project Foreman Bob Fair, above on left, and Apprentice Raymond Hall wrestle a piece of equipment to the ground, while (right), Linemen Richard Hallstrom, left, and Larry Brassard make connections to a new distribution-line pole that will send power out to Duxbury-area WEC members.

Next up, South Walden

The successful completion of the Moretown substation is a harbinger of future, similar efforts. Of Washington Electric's eight substations, all but the West Danville facility were beginning to show their age, and a few, because of outdated equipment and growth in the Co-op's membership, were at some risk of under-performing. Moretown went first because it was in the most serious condition.

Now WEC can shift its attention elsewhere.

"The South Walden sub is the next one we want to replace," said Anderson. "We're in the planning stage, with our engineers, Dufresne & Henry, and we hope to be able to get going on it soon."

Just as in Moretown, WEC received funding for new construction in South

Walden through its latest four-year work plan supported by RUS. And as in Moretown, WEC again will need the approval of the membership before it can go forward.

But the Co-op hopes to gain momentum for these projects, because the upgrades will increasingly be needed to provide the level of service WEC members want and deserve. Washington Electric must also be prepared to meet its statutory requirements to serve new electricity customers.

"Our South Walden project will improve the situation there in a lot of ways," said Weston. "We're talking, again, about reliability and power quality. The aesthetics will benefit because we're going to run our distribution lines in the same right-of-way as our transmission lines, meaning that the land-owner will



only have one power-line corridor going through his property. And the site will be screened by cedars and evergreens.

"Plus, we've got our design, taken from the Moretown project. That saves us \$50,000 right there."

Building a substation was something new for Washington Electric's staff, but

they concurred that it was an interesting, challenging change of pace from their customary work.

"And now that we've had the experience and worked so well as a team," said Weston, "we're just going to get better at it."

Former Teacher Deborah Brown Joins Co-op Staff

Washington Electric Cooperative has swapped a "member services representative" who lives in a stone house for one who lives in a log cabin! Deborah Brown has assumed the office location and many of the duties of Janice Cochran, who retired in June (see story, page 8). While Janice can now spend more time in her fieldstone house in Orange, Deborah commutes to WEC's East Montpelier offices from her log cabin on the Mackville Road in Hardwick. "My brother-in-law built the house to our specifications 26 years ago," says Deborah, who lives there with her husband, Ronald, and their two sons. "It was the first log cabin to be approved for a mortgage loan under the GI Bill."

Deborah comes to Washington Electric from Hazen Union High School, where she was a business education teacher for 27 years until the position was phased out. Also a 1971 graduate of Hazen Union, Deborah has a Bachelor's Degree in Education from Castleton State College and a Master's Degree from

Trinity College. She was born in Colchester, but the family moved repeatedly during her childhood – living for a time in Plainfield – as her father followed his calling as a tree surgeon.

After the rigors of teaching grades seven to 12 – long days and evenings spent in school, and nights devoted to lesson planning – Deborah finds the work and the atmosphere at WEC a peaceful contrast. "People in the office, and the members who come by or call, have been very friendly and helpful," she says.

Her warm smile and competence will serve her well at the Co-op.



Deborah Brown



The sign says it all.

Taming The Electricity Beast

Surge Suppressors, UPSs Of All Stripes Available Through WEC

There's danger lurking in the wiring. It may be the wiring within your walls, or the Co-op's power lines outside. "Danger" doesn't mean your home wiring is faulty, or that WEC's distribution equipment is unreliable. It simply means that electricity, by the nature of the beast, is sometimes more bucking bronco than swaybacked nag. It cannot always be governed and controlled, despite Washington Electric's considerable effort to safeguard "power quality" – the consistency of voltage delivered from the substation to your nearest power pole and right up to your house.

Power quality didn't used to be so important. In the old days the bulb in the ceiling fixture might dim for a second, but who cared? Now, though, power quality is an increasing concern for electric utilities because of the proliferation of microchip-dependent home and office equipment.

Those devices are also highly sensitive to the current that powers them, and are susceptible to damage should the current rise even momentarily. The microprocessors now employed in computers, printers and answering machines, TV sets and sound systems, refrigerators and washing machines, and the pumps that draw water from the well would do

better if electricity were only tamer. But electricity gets a little crazy sometimes, and the result is surges – power spikes – that can lobotomize all that brilliant and high-priced equipment.

That's why Washington Electric Cooperative has for years urged its members to invest in surge-protection devices. WEC has urged people not to buy just one of these surge protectors (also called power strips), but to get several of them – of good quality – and deploy them around the house. In the living room, use them to protect your TV, CD player and tuner; in the kitchen, the microwave and 'fridge; in the study, use them for the computer, fax and copier.

Trousers

A more sweeping plan is to install a whole-house surge protective device, at the electric meter outside the house or at the panel box inside. These must be installed by a licensed electrician.

Taken together – using whole-house devices and power strips, too – this is what Bill Powell, Washington Electric Co-op's director of products and services, calls the "belt-and-suspenders" approach to surge protection.

"Here's the belt," Powell says, holding up a circular Homeguard Surge Arrestor,

about six inches in diameter, which fits onto the base of the standard electric meter and stands ready to subdue any jolt of power that may come into the house from an untoward event on the power lines outside.

"And here are the suspenders," he adds, holding a three-pack of Power Tracker Surge Protection Devices, designed to accommodate different types of equipment.

"You need both to hold your pants up," Powell concludes.

The reason a homeowner should install the individual devices at her computer, satellite dish or fax modem is that not all the power surges come from outside. That can happen, of course. A lightning strike, a tree falling across the power lines or a motor vehicle accident involving a power pole might jar the utility's distribution system, and cause a power outage or a surge (sometimes both – the surge followed by the outage) which travels through the lines and into the "services" connecting members' homes and businesses to the grid.

If that happens, the Homeguard, mounted onto the meter base, will do just what its name implies.

For some people – usually those whose electric meters are mounted on

the power pole rather than the outside wall of the house – an alternative might be the LineMaster Surge Arrestor, a small black box you can wire to the electricity panel. Either will effectively tame the wild beast before it can get inside and fry your electronics.

An inside job

But what if the surge is caused by an electrical event within the house?

Houses are a little like the human anatomy ("the headbone's connected to the neckbone," etc.), in that all our electronics share the internal wiring in the walls. A surge might happen when something sends a brief pulse from the sump pump or the vacuum cleaner, for example, back through the electrical cord to the wall plug and thence to all the other outlets in the home – where the meek VCR or telephone answering machine could get the shock of a lifetime.

That's where the "suspenders" come in – the power-strip style devices that you can array inside your house wherever they're needed. The "belt" (the Homeguard-type device at the electric meter) is your Great Wall of China, but it's of little use for quelling internal rebellions.

Look no farther

The Co-op has recommended these protective devices for years, informing its members through *Co-op Currents* and other avenues of the importance of installing surge-protectors. But now Washington Electric has turned a new page – literally and figuratively. WEC is making the finest protective, power-quality equipment available to its members, directly through the Co-op; You can find information about these and other recommended items every month in *Co-op Currents* on a new page called The Co-op Store.

The Store debuts in this issue, on this page. You'll also notice WEC can help you obtain a UPS – an "Uninterruptible Power Supply" device that detects an outage before it reaches you and instantly switches your computer (or other equipment) to battery-supplied electricity. The surge suppressors may be your belt and suspender but – particularly for people with home office equipment – the UPS could save your shirt.

Said Powell, "We're talking about a different level of protection with the advanced devices on the market today. And we don't just recommend them anymore. We can help people determine what their needs are, and through the Co-op buy the best equipment to meet those needs."

The Co-op Store will regularly feature information on products available through WEC. You can also sign onto WEC's website – www.washingtonco-op.com – for information about these products. Or call Bill Powell at the Co-op for personal consultation and advice.

There's no time like the present to get started using these services. Consider it a "power-quality-of-life" investment.

WEC CO-OP STORE

Shop for:

Lighting Products

Contact the Co-op for high-quality efficient products at member discount prices.

Power Quality Products

This month's special:
Uninterruptible power supply (UPS) 250VA. Protect your computer and avoid loss of data. \$119, plus 5% VT tax, \$6.37 shipping and handling.

Call the Co-op at
800-932-5245
or visit us on the web at
www.washingtonco-op.com



www.washingtonco-op.com

Annual Meeting

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The bylaw amendments were approved by a vote of 913-69, and the Amended Articles of Incorporation passed 820-68.

Bernstein thanked the staff for preparing the complex and legalistic amendments. "This was not an easy thing, to bring bylaws up to date that were written in the 1940s and 1950s," he said. And he reminded the members that this was a two-step process – that further revisions would be proposed next year to allow the Co-op to take full advantage of the financial and member-service opportunities that state law now permits.

Incidentally, one of the bylaw changes is that WEC's duly elected governing body is now called the Board of Directors, not the Board of Trustees.

Yankee and "green power"

Washington Electric's Annual Meeting presented an opportunity for the board, management, members and guests to discuss "power supply," a subject of growing importance as WEC's contract for wholesale power with the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant nears its expiration date of November 2002. Other contracts are in their final months and years as well. In all, Washington Electric faces decisions for replacing from 30 percent to 60 percent of its contracted wholesale power.

The surprising news was that WEC might become one of the first utilities, nationally, to invest in renewable energy as a significant part of its energy mix. Working with its Boston-based consultant firm, La Capra Associates, the Co-op has been in the process of analyzing its alternatives, and the situation appears to provide opportunity rather than crisis.

"We've found that what we're looking for is not what most utilities are looking for," explained General Manager Patt, "because it's out of fashion these days. And that's long-term, economically stable energy contracts."



Co-op member Joe Bongiovanni, manager of the Hardwick Electric Dept., leads a discussion about Vermont Yankee. At right, WEC President Barry Bernstein with one of the Co-op's earliest members, Barbara Fitch of East Montpelier.

Patt said it had become more popular for utilities to dabble in the "spot market" for wholesale power. WEC prefers to avoid the pricing volatility of short-term contracts. It was a pleasant surprise to discover that looking for dependable, long-term contracts led to potential sources of affordable "green" power, from landfill gas (methane), wind, and small-scale hydroelectricity generators. Many such companies need investments, in the form of power-sale contracts, to bring their generation projects to fruition.

"Although we are still in preliminary discussions with these power suppliers, the discussions are encouraging," said Patt.

Co-op Currents will keep members informed as power-supply decisions are made, and invites members to comment in these pages with their own perspectives.

Also at the Annual Meeting, Joe Bongiovanni – a WEC member from Marshfield, former Washington Electric general manager and currently the manager of the Hardwick Electric Department – led a discussion of the imminent auction of the Vermont Yankee nuclear



power plant in Vernon. Bongiovanni and WEC President Bernstein enumerated the environmental dangers and economic injustice for Vermonters that they said would result from selling the plant to an outside "highest bidder."

"The operation of Vermont Yankee must continue to be safe, and Vermont has control of that as long as (state regulators) have control over the two utilities that own it," said Bongiovanni, referring to Central Vermont Public Service Corp. and Green Mountain Power Corp. "But the regulators (by proposing this auction) are saying it's okay for the owners to sell it out-of-state."

Bongiovanni and Bernstein warned against such a loss of local control.

"The final determination of what happens with Vermont Yankee still rests with the Vermont Public Service Board," said Bernstein. "People need to speak up and be heard by the Board. (Selling Vermont Yankee to an out-of-state corporation) is not a political question, but a question of whether you think the site will be safe for your grandchildren."

"Because after 2008 Vermont Yankee's high-level nuclear waste will be cast in concrete, on-site, if the government has not located and constructed a national repository. And the waste will be there long beyond when any of us in this room will be around."

Getting interesting

As the meeting neared conclusion, Bernstein summarized WEC's position at the start of its 63rd year of providing power to 9,000 member/owners in central Vermont.

"WEC is at a time where we have a great deal on our plate, from power-supply questions and our hope to be able to support renewable power generators; to the ongoing debate about electric deregulation; to Vermont Yankee and representing public issues related to that; to meeting our members' needs for a wider array of energy-related services."

Stay tuned, through *Co-op Currents* and WEC's web page, www.washingtonco-op.com. The coming year promises to be an interesting one.



General Manager Avram Patt presents warehouse Stockkeeper Scott Martino with a 10-year service award. At right, Operations Director Dan Weston chats it up with Lucille Anderson, from West Topsham, and her son over dinner. WEC's Jan Cochran, standing, listens in.



‘As Real As They Come’

Co-op Voice Jan Cochran Hangs It Up

After 16 years of being “the voice of the Co-op,” Janice Cochran knows what members want when they call with a question, concern or complaint.

“They want a real person (to talk to),” she said recently. “We’ve still got a lot of people out there who don’t want to talk to voice mail. They want a real person. That’s why even during power outages we bring in real people to answer the calls.”

They don’t come any realer than Jan. In fact, that’s how Co-op Lineman Dennis Bador characterized Jan as he watched her opening gifts at her retirement party at the Co-op’s garage on a sunny Friday, in June.

“They don’t come any better,” said Bador. “She’s as real as air.”

And unfortunately for the Co-op, she is really retired. The tall, stately woman who joined Washington Electric’s staff in 1985 after serving as chair of the ballot committee – which authorizes the credentials of Board candidates before each annual meeting – will spend this summer entertaining grandchildren with her husband, Ken, at their home on the Cutler Corner Road in Orange. Then, in the fall, the two will relax (as much as a couple of industrious people can relax) and enjoy the retirement they have worked for, long and hard.

Jan and Ken Cochran returned to Vermont from Virginia Beach, Virginia, some 20 years ago, following Ken’s retirement from the U.S. Navy. It was a homecoming because Ken had been raised in East Barre, while Jan grew up in Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire. They did a lot of traveling during their Navy years, serving stints at bases up and down the East Coast, including a blimp base in Lakehurst, New Jersey. They were also stationed in the Philippines in 1969 and 1970.

During those military years the couple had four children – two boys and a pair of girls – and Jan performed office and cashier work at some of their posts for the Navy Exchange, an on-base department store.

In a sense, though, it was after they returned home that the real work began. With Jan employed at the Co-op and Ken working part-time for WEC as a meter-reader, the couple and their remaining children lived in a mobile home on their property in Orange. Ken raised cattle and began building their dream house out of the field stones he unearthed and stockpiled on the land. It has been a labor of love, and is truly a work of art.

Even though they moved into the house several years ago Ken is still working on it, and Jan puts in her time as his



Janice and Ken Cochran, at Janice's retirement party.

helpmate.

“All the stone came from our land,” she said. “You see a knob in the ground and start digging. One time I did that and we got a stone as big as the kitchen table.”

‘A good touch’

To WEC members, though, Janice Cochran is best known as the neighborly and very distinguishable voice at 223-5245, their electric cooperative. She hired on as staff secretary and held that position until a staff restructuring in the mid ‘90s changed her title to member services representative. Through the changes, she kept two long-time assignments: she continued to perform the essential paperwork for the engineering department, and – of primary importance to WEC’s members – she stayed on the telephone.

“Janice has always had a good touch with people on the phone,” said WEC General Manager Avram Patt. “She’s patient and friendly. It’s been a real pleasure and a comfort to have her representing us when people call in.”

“I guess talking to people is old-fashioned,” said Jan, “but

if you want to help them out and do the job the right way at the Co-op you’ve got to be old-fashioned.”

There are some ways in which Washington Electric is becoming less old-fashioned, and a good example is the new, automated outage-response and reporting system. It enables Co-op workers manning the phone lines during storms to tap into localized outage information on their computer screens while they are answering calls, and then enter the data the caller is reporting and provide more detailed information immediately over the phone. The system was installed and put to work during the



Lots of hugs for Jan on this day. Here, Lineman Dennis Bador bids his adieus.

storms in the latter part of last winter.

“The new outage system helps a lot,” Jan said. “We can give people more information, and that helps put their mind to rest.”

Over the years, Jan has put in her share of overtime during storms.

“Twenty-six hours was my longest stint,” she said. “That was a few years back, the year (former WEC engineer) Max Gray retired. In the last storm this winter I put in 21 hours.”

That’s the kind of service that members get from their Cooperative’s employees. It’s not only the line crews working endlessly in stormy conditions; it’s also the people who staff the office during emergencies, talking to members and coordinating WEC’s outage response.

People like Janice Cochran – as real as air, in Dennis Bador’s words.

(Bador surprised Jan with a special gift at her retirement party, which was also attended by other former employees like Allen Heath, Harvey George, Cy Lambertson and Rita Roy. Bador’s gift was a framed reprint of a photograph of Janice’s grandfather, Clarence Chandler, who was road foreman in Worcester in the 1920s and ‘30s. Mr. Chandler is seated atop the town’s first road grader, an impressive if odd-looking contraption.)

“I’m a Co-op member, too,” Jan said. “I can understand people’s frustration, when you might look across the road and somebody’s got their lights but you don’t because your power comes off another line. A couple of times I’ve told (callers) that my husband was sitting home in the dark, too.

“I’m going to miss talking to them,” she said.

But traces of Janice will remain, like echoes.

“Most of the messages on the automated calls are ones that I have programmed,” she said. “The delinquent-bill notice is my voice, and the (automated call advising members of) planned outages.”

But the real Jan Cochran will be hunting and fishing with Ken (she brought down a deer once but isn’t sure she’ll ever pull a trigger again; she just likes the woods), bowling and working on their stone house.

“I’ve been fortunate all around,” she said, toting up life’s gifts: eight grandchildren, a fine, homemade home, a happy career at the Co-op and 46 years of marriage, which she and Ken celebrated in July.

Washington Electric has been fortunate as well, in having Jan Cochran put its best foot forward as the loyal and steadfast “voice of the Co-op.”