

WEC CO-OP CURRENTS

Vol. 64, No. 2

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

March/April 2003

Know Your Co-op

'Follow The Money:' It's A Full-Time Job For WEC's Finance Department

From the outside of its modest office building on Route 14 in East Montpelier, Washington Electric Cooperative doesn't look like a particularly dynamic or sizable operation. But looks can be deceiving. In addition to a warehouse and garage a mile away the Co-op also owns an electric distribution infrastructure that stretches out through 41 towns, covering a large portion of central Vermont. The system includes eight widely dispersed substations, 21,768 utility poles and 1,256 miles of power line.

WEC does between \$10 million and \$11 million in business a year. Because it's a not-for-profit co-op, roughly the same amount of money (say, \$10.5 million) comes in as goes out.

Keeping track of the revenues, paying all the bills, reporting monthly to the Board of Directors and generally overseeing the Co-op's balance sheet is the job of Washington Electric's three-person Finance Department. Finance Director

Janet LaRochelle, Finance Assistant Linda Nelson and Senior Accountant Teia Greenslit occupy a pair of offices on WEC's small second floor. (Except for their offices, a meeting room and a storage area, WEC's headquarters is a one-story building.)

"We're quiet up here by ourselves," Linda Nelson admits, "but we work hard. The volume of paper that goes through here is impressive."

WEC's annual budget is determined not by the Finance Department but by the elected Board of Directors. Each year, prior to the annual membership meeting in May, the Board treasurer provides a full financial report to the membership (look for it in next month's *Co-op Currents*). This is done with the assistance of Janet LaRochelle, who reports on WEC's finances to the Board every month.

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WEC's Finance Department manages a budget greater than \$10 million for a Co-op of 9,200 members.

Manager's Report

Fielding Member Inquiries:

Renewables, Phone And Internet Services Are Subjects Of Interest

By Avram Patt

Washington Electric Co-op members like to ask questions and share their thoughts. They may be "big picture" ones about where we get our power from, or more specific ones

about the way we conduct our business day-to-day. In the course of my job, I field calls, visits, letters and emails directly from members, and also many that are forwarded to me through other Co-op employees. Here's a sample of some

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Inside

Know Your Co-op. This month Co-op Currents continues its series introducing the people and departments that make your Co-op work. The cover story on WEC's Finance Department continues on page 5.

A Bylaw amendment proposes to scrap some of the formalities related to becoming a member, in the interest of streamlining the process. The proposed changes also include provisions related to joint membership. You'll be voting on this soon, so please refer to page 8.



With Annual Meeting approaching, three Co-op members are offering to serve on WEC's Board of Directors. Get acquainted with them on page 4.

WEC is now offering new products to protect your electronic equipment from power surges. Page 6.

Washington Electric Cooperative
East Montpelier, VT 05651

Hellos And Goodbyes

Recent months have brought several staff changes to Washington Electric Cooperative. One of our veteran employees has moved on to a new job in the electric co-op field, which necessitated that this native Vermonter relocate to Missouri. Two staff members have undertaken new assignments and challenges here at Washington Electric Co-op. And there's a new face in our Member Services Department, seated behind the counter at WEC's office headquarters in East Montpelier.

On January 3, the Co-op reluctantly said goodbye to MIS Manager **Mike Bizzozero**. Mike served the Co-op with distinction for 22 years. A resident of Barre Town, he joined the Co-op's billing department in 1980, but his versatility, reliability and technical skills proved a great

asset and over time he moved among several positions, answering the bell where we needed him. This culminated in his appointment in the mid-1990s as WEC's first Manager of Information Systems. At an electric utility, "information

systems" goes far beyond office computer networking; the Co-op's systems help WEC monitor equipment along 1,200 miles of power lines and substations from the central office, and improve outage response and communication with Co-op members during emergencies.

"The technology was beginning to get quite sophisticated and we needed someone who would take charge of that as a sole responsibility," said General Manager Avram Patt. "Mike knew the Co-op inside and out, and because of his

experience as a dispatcher – coordinating the work of the line crews during storms – he understood the electric distribution system as well as our office processes. As MIS manager, he helped us modernize. We deeply appreciate the contributions he made to the Co-op for all these years."

Mike's new job is with the National Information Solutions Cooperative, which is based near St. Louis. He works with electric co-ops around the country on computerized mapping systems, which improve emergency response time. NISC

'As MIS manager, Mike Bizzozero helped us modernize. We deeply appreciate the contributions he made to the Co-op for all these years.'

—Avram Patt



Mike Bizzozero, right, worked many a storm as a dispatcher, as in this photo, where he, Steve Hart (left) and Max Gray coordinated the work of the line crews.

provides several services to Washington Electric Co-op.

"Mike was well-liked by everyone," said Patt. "We were sorry to see him leave, but pleased that he took a job with our information systems provider. Perhaps we'll run into him from time to time."

Replacing Mike Bizzozero as MIS manager is **Kevin Stevens**, formerly of the Engineering Department. Kevin's association with Washington Electric began while he was still in school, when he worked during the summers as a part-time employee doing field work. Kevin joined the staff full-time in 1994. As a utility field technician in the Engineering Department in recent years, Kevin designed power lines for both new construction and reconstruction when lines needed to be moved or upgraded.



Kevin Stevens

The Calais resident faced competition for the MIS job. WEC's job advertisement drew about 20 applications, including some from people with advanced training and degrees.

"We concluded that Kevin's knowledge and experience with our system, together with his interest, initiative, work ethic, personality and ability to grow, made him the best candidate," said Patt. "While with the Engineering Department he showed great aptitude and initiative in fully developing and integrating the engineering and mapping functions of our IT (information technology) systems. He has also, on his own, been taking IT coursework."

"Hiring for this position confronted us with some interesting choices," said Patt, "and we're confident that we made a good one."

WEC has now begun interviewing for a new field technician to replace Kevin in the Engineering Department.

Another vacancy was created at the end of 2002, when Member Services

Representative **Deborah Brown** was appointed to the position of Administrative Assistant. A Hardwick resident, Debbie came to the Co-op in 2001 after a 27-year career as a business education teacher at Hazen Union High School. She was asked to become the Co-op's Administrative Assistant when the Board and management concluded that the position, which had remained vacant for a few years, was important for WEC's operations and needed to be filled.



Deborah Brown

"Debbie has taken on support services assisting the management staff as well as the Board of Directors," said Patt. "She's capable, reliable, and very professional. She will take over certain member-related functions – in particular, the capital credits program which is now in its sixth year. It's been a big job getting that program off the ground, and involved a number of our employees. But we think the capital credits program is to the point now where it can be managed by a good, competent person, and Debbie has agreed to take it on, among her other support duties."

That brings us to **Elaine Gonier**, a resident of Williamstown who replaces Debbie Brown in the Member Services Department. Elaine joined the staff in November. She worked for the Barre company Bonacorsi & Sons for seven years, handling accounts



Elaine Gonier

Co-op Currents

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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 Management and Programs Administrator Administrative Assistant Deborah Brown, 802-223-5245.

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Manager's Report

Manager's Report

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recent inquiries:

What's the status of WEC's renewable energy efforts?

Over the past year, we have reported several times about your Co-op's efforts to meet our future power supply needs from renewable sources. We are actively working on some possible projects and if we are successful, will be reporting on these in great detail over the next year or so. The energy sources that appear to hold the most promise for us are landfill methane and wind.

As I write this, the world and our nation are in great turmoil, and WEC's members, along with citizens across the state and nation, have a full range of opinions about our country's military actions and foreign relations, and about our domestic economy. The current state of affairs causes us concern about energy prices in the short term, but also raises longer-term concerns about availability and price of fossil fuels as well as about energy security.

While I cannot predict how events will have unfolded by the time you read this, it has become even more apparent now and in the time since the September 11th World Trade Center tragedy, that WEC's energy strategies offer a greater degree of security, predictability and stability over the long run. As we have been doing for many years, we continue to promote the wise and efficient use of energy. The less we use to meet our needs, the less it costs and the less energy-dependent we are. WEC's efficiency services are available to all our residential members, and we will continue to devote space in this newsletter to educating members on using energy efficiently.

But we will need new sources of electric generation, and renewable sources become more attractive with every passing day. Not only is the cost of renewable energy predictable and stable if we are willing to make "old-fashioned" longer-term commitments, but the costs are coming down as well. Still, choices will need to be made, and Vermonters will need to grapple with the fact that generating renewable energy close to home means that projects will need to be sited somewhere in our landscape.

Developing renewable energy sources is not easy. But in these unsettling and unpredictable times, it seems even

clearer to me that the commitment your Board of Directors made two years ago to a renewable energy strategy for the Co-op's future was a wise move.

New Products and Services

We continue to receive many inquiries about the several new products and services the Co-op is offering. I encourage

you to check the "Co-op Store" section of this newsletter, or our website. The dial-up internet access offered to members by VtLink.net is a reliable service at a good price, offered by a local business. Our recently improved line of surge suppressors and power quality products offers protection to members with computers and other sensitive electronic equipment (see page six).

Many members have already signed up for the long distance telephone service available to Co-op members from PowerNet Global, and after receiving their phone bills for a month or two, a number have contacted us to say how pleased they are with the cost. Our goal was to offer a service with competitive rates, with no gimmicks or monthly minimum charges,

which would be attractive to most members. A few nights ago, I saw an ad on TV from a major long distance provider, offering a flat 90-cent charge on any long distance call up to twenty minutes. After sifting through the razzle-dazzle, I calculated that this would be a

pretty good rate for a twenty-minute call, that it would be a so-so rate for a ten-minute call, and a really lousy rate for a five-minute call.

By contrast, we know that many WEC members are looking for a good, straightforward, "what you see is what you get" long distance service, and we found one for you.

A member recently asked me if the Co-op "makes any money" on these products and services. When I told him there was a modest mark-up, he thought that was good for the Co-op and that we should tell members this.

So: We offer long distance calling, internet access, and power quality products primarily as an added benefit of your WEC membership. Included in the prices and rates is a modest margin for WEC. By purchasing these quality products and services through WEC, you are getting a good deal and providing a small financial benefit to your Co-op as well.



Avram Patt

We know that many WEC members are looking for a good, straightforward, "what you see is what you get" long distance service, and we found one for you.



A trash-to-energy project in Connecticut, from which WEC purchases electricity. More methane-generated power may be in WEC's future.

The Zip Code on Your Bill Envelope

An attentive member recently asked one of our Member Services Representatives why his monthly bill is mailed from a non-Vermont zip code.

Although WEC purchases goods and services from suppliers and vendors throughout the country, we do try to purchase locally whenever we can. In this case, WEC has for a great many years been a member of the National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC), which provides us and several hundred other electric co-ops with a wide range of information and computer system design and support. These billing, engineering, mapping, accounting, and outage-reporting systems are specifically tailored to meet the needs of small rural co-ops.

By serving hundreds of co-ops, NISC can provide higher quality service at lower cost than WEC could get elsewhere. So WEC's bills are printed and mailed by NISC from their large mailing center near St. Louis.

But unlike many other companies these days, all payments are processed

here in Vermont. Our Member Services Department handles all payments mailed or brought to the office, and when you call with an inquiry, the phone rings (and is answered) here in East Montpelier.

Interestingly, up until a few years ago, our old postcard bills were mailed from East Montpelier but all our billing data was actually stored and managed on a big old mainframe computer outside St. Louis, with which we communicated by satellite dish. Now we keep and manage all our billing and other data here at the office, but we are able to provide much more information on our bills and to include bill inserts as well, through NISC's sophisticated mailing operation.

Just Ask

These are just a few of the types of questions we regularly get from WEC members. If you have a question, please ask and we will do our best to answer you individually. If you have a question that you think will interest other members, send it to the editor of *Co-op Currents*, and we'll answer it for everyone to see.

Hello and Goodbyes

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receivable. When the company was sold Elaine was faced with the choice of transferring to Burlington or finding another job. Fortunately, she landed at the Co-op.

Like her coworkers in the Member Services Department, Elaine has a variety of duties. She is one of the Co-op's receptionists, and also handles certain financial transactions and communicates with members when WEC's meter-readers run into difficulty in the field. These communications are known among the staff as "bad dog" letters or "locked gate" letters.

"Those are some of the typical problems our meter readers face,"

Elaine explains. "People are supposed to provide safe access to the meters, and when they don't we have to contact them and see that it's straightened out." The Co-op needs an accurate meter reading in order to charge customers correctly.

The mother of two daughters, ages 9 and 12, Elaine also assists Right-of-Way Coordinator Mike Myers, contacting Co-op members and town clerks before Myers sends crews out for right-of-way clearing projects.

A Spaulding High School graduate, Elaine Gonier spent four years in the Navy as a payroll clerk, serving much of that time in Hawaii. After her military service she lived and worked in Florida for 14 years before returning to her roots in chilly Vermont.



Three Candidates For WEC's Board of Directors

Three member/owners of Washington Electric Cooperative have come forward as candidates for the Co-op's Board of Directors in 2003. If elected, they would serve for three years, their terms on the Board ending in 2006.

Every year three seats on WEC's nine-member Board expire, providing the membership an opportunity to elect one-third of the Board that makes leadership decisions for the member-owned cooperative, and oversees management and staff. This year the Directors whose terms will expire upon the Annual Meeting (they remain Board members until that event) are **Roger Fox** of Walden, **Richard Rubin** of Plainfield, and **Cornelia**

Swayze of Tunbridge. Fox and Rubin are offering their services as Co-op Directors again, but Swayze has decided not to run for another term. She was appointed to the Board in December 1996 to fill a vacancy, and was formally elected by the members for a three-year term at the next Annual Meeting, which was in May 1997. She ran successfully for a second term in 2000. In all, Cornelia Swayze has served Washington Electric's members for six and a half years.

Joining Roger Fox and Richard Rubin on the ballot this year is a Co-op member from the town of Washington, **Marion Milne**.

The election of Directors is performed by ballots sent to each Washington

Electric Cooperative member by mail in the weeks prior to WEC's Annual Meeting. **Check your ballots to determine when the deadline is for posting your votes by mail.** Members who attend the Annual Meeting can vote at that time, if they wish, rather than by mail. The meeting, which includes dinner, will be held at the Montpelier Elks Club on Tuesday evening, May 20. (A schedule of events for the Annual Meeting, and a coupon for the dinner, will be printed in the next issue of *Co-op Currents*.)

Voters can write in the names of other Co-op members who are not official candidates on their ballot, if they choose. Therefore, even though there are only three official candidates for three seats

this year, these candidates cannot be presumed to win until the votes are counted.

Printed below are brief biographical sketches submitted by the candidates, which contain information on each person's background and involvement with the Cooperative or other avenues of community service. Voters will have a chance to hear in more depth from the three official candidates before casting their ballots. The upcoming "Annual Meeting" issue of *Co-op Currents* will feature their responses to a series of questions about issues related to Board service. It will provide readers a better sense of the interests, viewpoints and experience of the three candidates.

Report of the 2003 Committee On Candidates

The 2003 Committee on Candidates convened a teleconference on Tuesday, March 25, at 7:00 p.m. to review the petitions and qualifications of those members who have submitted their names as candidates for the Board of Directors. This year, three (3) members of the Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc. submitted their names as candidates for the three (3) Board positions to be filled. The Committee on Candidates hereby affirms:

- that each candidate submitted a valid petition in accordance with Article III, Section 3A of the Bylaws;
- that each has signed a statement of affirmation indicating that they:
 1. have been a member of the Co-op in good standing for at least six months;
 2. are residents of Vermont;
 3. are not employees of the Cooperative;
 4. do not have a conflict of interest as defined in Article III, Section 2 of the Bylaws; and
 5. have received and understand the responsibilities and time commitments required of a director.

Therefore, the Committee determines all of the candidates to be qualified for the position of director in accordance with the Cooperative's Bylaws, and hereby presents the following official listing of

candidates for the Washington Electric Cooperative 2003 election of Directors:

*Roger Fox
Marion Milne
Richard Rubin*

2003 Committee on Candidates:

John Bellefeuille
Joseph Bongiovanni*
Betty Crowell
Michael Duane
David Grundy
Gene Parent*
Yvette Tomlinson

**did not participate in the teleconference*

Roger Fox

Residence: I live at Dows Crossing in Walden. I have been a Walden resident and WEC member since 1971

Profession: Screen printer/graphic designer.

Community Service/WEC: I was first elected to WEC's Board of Directors (then called the Board of Trustees) in 1991. I served as clerk of the Board from 1992 through 1998, and have held the position of Co-op vice-president since December 1998. I chair the Board's Members & Markets



Committee and serve as a member of the Policy Committee. I am treasurer of the Northeast Association of Electric Cooperatives (serving New York and New England).

My civic contributions include being a Justice of the Peace in my community, and serving as chair of the Walden Board of Civil Authority and as Walden Town Moderator. I am a member of the Buffalo Mountain Food Co-op.

Marion C. Milne

Residence: I am proud to be a resident of Washington, Vermont, where I have lived for 40 years and raised a family. I have three grown children and eight wonderful grandchildren. Through all those years, we have been members of the Co-op.



Education/Profession: I earned a B.A. from Goddard College as an adult. I started Milne Travel in 1975 in Barre and helped make it a successful business.

Community Service/WEC: I have held various town offices in Washington, and served the town as a member of the Vermont House of Representatives for three terms. I have led the local United Way campaign, served as president of the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce, and held offices in many other community organizations. As Co-op members, we have followed the changes in the Co-op and remained interested in its issues. Without adequate and affordable sources of power, well-maintained delivery systems, and responsive maintenance workers, we're going to find ourselves sitting at home in the dark and the cold. I want to do my part to ensure that the Co-op remains a good provider of power to our communities.

Richard I. Rubin

Residence: I have lived in Plainfield for 30 years. I am married to Jayne Israel and have three children: Sam, Nicko and Amanda.

Education/Profession: I was born and raised in the Boston area, attended Harvard College and then the University of Pennsylvania Law School. After graduating law school in 1970 I practiced law in Boston, representing low-income clients for two years before moving to Vermont.



I have practiced law in central Vermont since 1972, and for many years our law firm – Rubin, Kidney, Myer & DeWolfe – has had offices in downtown Barre. My practice has involved representing all kinds of people with a variety of problems and issues. Primarily, I am a trial lawyer.

Community Service/WEC: I completed my first three-year term as a WEC director in 2002, and ran for re-election. Due to the early resignation of a

Richard Rubin

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Board member there were four Board positions to be filled in that election; based on vote totals, I was named to

serve out the final year of the resigned director's term. In total, I have served on WEC's Board of Directors for four years.

I was a member of the Twinfield

School Board for five years, and I am currently a director of Vermont Legal Aid and the Vermont Trail Lawyers Association. Many years ago I was involved with my brother, Mathew Rubin, in creating the Wrightsville

hydroelectric facility and the Winooski 8 hydroelectric plant in East Montpelier.

Finance Department

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What goes out....

On the expense side of the ledger, Janet says, "buying **wholesale power** is by far our biggest cost. In 2002 we paid around \$4.6 million for purchased power, which includes transmission costs. That's about 46 percent of our budget."

Other significant financial outlays include:

- **Payroll and benefits for a staff of 36 employees.** This is the Co-op's second-largest cost category. In 2002 payroll and benefits came to a little more than \$1.64 million;
- **Insurance;**
- **Payments to a multitude of contractors,** among them: the tree-trimming crews that maintain power line rights-of-way; WEC's power-supply consultant, La Capra Associates of Boston; the people who plow out the substations after a snowfall; the company that hauls away the trash; the Co-op's part-time meter readers; the humble editor of *Co-op Currents*;
- **Equipment.** All those poles and wires, the electric meter mounted at your house, the transformers, fuses, insulators, etc., must be purchased; the same goes for computers, printers, copiers and other office equipment;
- **Loan repayments** to the federal Rural Utilities Service (RUS), which provides capital for WEC's major construction programs, and the Cooperative Finance Corp. (CFC), a nationwide funding resource that is owned by electric co-ops. "We've got a line-of-credit with CFC that's absolutely essential to get us through the occasional low-cash periods," Linda Nelson explains;
- **Property taxes.** "There are 41 towns that we pay property taxes in," says Finance Director LaRoche. "In recent years we've seen this category (of expenses) climb quite a bit."



Linda Nelson

Although the Finance Department is plenty busy from day to day, staff members keep an eye out for discounts and take advantage of them when possible.

"Some towns – not a lot of them, but some – will reduce your payment by 3 percent if you pay your property tax within the first month (after receiving your bill)," says Teia Greenslit, who writes all the checks. "That's true for some of our vendors, too; they'll give a one- or two-percent discount for payments in the first 10 days. We meet those deadlines to save the Co-op money."

Teia estimates that she writes 250 checks a month (including electronic payments). About a tenth of them are payroll-related. For the other 90 percent – to contractors, town clerks, power suppliers, etc. – she follows a process of receiving the bills from various WEC departments, obtaining payment authorization from General Manager Avram Patt, then performing electronic transactions or writing checks and stuffing the envelopes. Every payment is then logged into the system records.

What comes in....

Electricity accounts not only for WEC's largest expense but its greatest revenues. **The electric bills paid by 9,200, mostly residential, Co-op members**



Teia Greenslit

keep the company in business. The Finance Department doesn't send out the bills or receive members' payments, which are jobs handled by the Member Services Department. But once the money has come in and been deposited Janet, Linda and Teia maintain the

"income" side of the ledger, too.

WEC also has other, though comparatively minor, sources of revenue.

"We get **money from the telephone and cable companies** that attach to our lines," says Janet. They are modest fees, but as cable services expand farther into the countryside they rent space on an increasing number of the Co-op's poles.

Also in terms of non-operational revenue (that is, income apart from electrici-

ty sales), WEC makes money on certain investments. Among these are **dividends received from the Vermont Electric Power Company (VELCO)**, the Rutland-based company that provides major power-transmission services to Vermont utilities.

"They bill us for transmission," General Manager Patt explains, "but apart from that, VELCO is a stockholder company owned by the Vermont utilities, and it pays dividends in proportion to the utilities' shares, based on the utility's electricity usage. We also receive **patronage refunds from national service co-ops** of which we're a member, like our lender, CFC, and the National Information Solutions Cooperative."

In their second-floor hideaway Janet, Linda and Teia track and record all these various transactions. They pay the bills promptly, and annually submit their books for auditing by an RUS-approved CPA – currently Mudgett, Jennett and Krogh-Wisner, P.C., of Montpelier.

WEC's financial team has plenty of service time. Janet LaRoche has been with the Co-op for more than 23 years (she plans to retire at the end of 2003), Linda Nelson is marking her 20th year, and Teia Greenslit came to WEC in 1995. They are all Barre-area residents, with Linda being a Co-op member herself.



Janet LaRoche

Capital credits for all

One of the biggest projects the Finance Department ever undertook was helping to construct and refine Washington Electric's capital credit distribution system when WEC began dividing shares of its "margins"

(comparable to profits) among Co-op members five years ago.

Washington Electric's budgetary goal is to obtain enough revenue to cover its expenses – but not much more. In years when revenues exceed expenses after the books are closed, that extra money belongs to the members. Called "capital

'Some towns will reduce your payment by 3 percent if you pay your property tax within the first month. We meet those deadlines to save the Co-op money.'

— Teia Greenslit

credits," the margins are divided among them in proportion to how much electricity people had purchased during the year. These are not cash transactions, but bookkeeping entries in each member's name.

In 1998 WEC reached the goals set by federal regulators that permitted the Co-op to begin capital credit distributions, and the Board decided WEC could afford to do so on a limited basis. But a system had to be devised, going back all the way to the Co-op's founding in 1939 and tracking all the years that ended with margins and all the people who had been Co-op members during those years.

The Board's policy has been to budget around \$200,000 annually for capital credit repayments, and distribute margins both from recent years and from years long past so that more people can enjoy the benefits. Each year the Co-op calculates appropriate distributions for more than 10,000 people, including many who are deceased or have moved away. WEC tracks down as many of the prospective recipients possible, makes cash payments – or (for present members) applies deductions to their electric bills – then brings their capital credit entries up to date in the Co-op's books.

The Finance Department took much of the responsibility of devising a system for this ambitious effort, then piloted it through the first five years, smoothing out the bumps in the process. It has now been handed off to Deborah Brown, WEC's new Administrative Assistant.

So yes, Janet, Linda and Teia are quiet in their upstairs sanctuary. But with more than \$10 million coming in and going out in a number of directions, they keep the financial ship afloat for the 9,000-plus members of Washington Electric Cooperative.

MARKETPLACE

FOR SALE: DP Air Stepper with heart monitor. Used very little. Price: \$150, negotiable. Will consider a trade for the right rowing machine. ALSO: Foldable keyboard with full-size keys. Includes owner's manual and carry case. For Palm III, VII, M100/1. Fits M100 series without rechargeable batteries. Still in original shrink wrap. Regularly retails for around \$100. Will sell for \$25. 433-6170



Point-Of-Entry; Point-Of-Use; WEC's 'Wardrobe' Of Surge Suppressers

By Bill Powell
Director of Products & Services

Microwave ovens, telephones, televisions, computers, refrigerators... The list could go on and on: home appliances that we take for granted, much as we take for granted the electricity needed to operate this equipment.

Until the power goes out. Or when electrical disturbances – usually brief, sometimes instantaneous – alter the flow of current, and occasionally damage an appliance. Then we value not only electric power but power “quality,” which keeps our equipment safe and working properly.

Your Co-op invests considerable money and effort in preventing power outages and limiting the effects of those that do occur. Similarly, a lot of effort and power-line equipment goes into ensuring the quality (consistency) of the power that

reaches your home. Yet there is always the possibility of power surges, sometimes from disturbances on WEC's electrical system and sometimes from disturbances within your home's own wiring.

What can you do about the risk that power surges pose to your household equipment? Usually, damages can be prevented by installing high-quality protective devices.

There are, generally, two types of surge-protection devices. Primary protection can be achieved by installing a device under your electric meter. We call this protection at the “point of entry.” The other approach is to put protective devices at the specific places around your house where the appliance or equipment is located. We call this pro-

tection at the “point of use.”

WEC recommends the “belt-and-suspenders” approach to home power-surge suppression. Some people wear suspenders as a basic part of their wardrobe.

Others wear a belt. Both achieve the goal of keeping the trousers up. When the goal is keeping your costly electrical equipment safe, the best course is to use both the belt and suspenders: surge protection both at the point of entry and the point of use.

The belt-and-suspenders approach may appear redundant, but there is good reason for this recommendation. Research has shown that a significant percentage of damage to motors, power supplies and microprocessor chips is

caused by voltage fluctuations within the building. These internal disturbances may not be as severe as disturbances that enter through the electric meter from lightning or other causes on the “grid,” but internal disturbances can affect delicate microprocessors over time, and cause premature failure. This can be prevented by “point-of-use” surge suppression, in the form of so-called “power strips.” These devices also serve as multi-plugs to accommodate several apparatuses. They stand between the equipment you wish to protect and the home's internal wiring.

Used together, the belt-and-suspenders approach can spare you the inconvenience and cost of losing equipment and of making claims on your homeowner's insurance policy. The whole-house protection devices and power strips that you can buy through WEC come with manufacturers' warranties; if your equipment should somehow

Research has shown that a significant percentage of damage to motors, power supplies and microprocessor chips is caused by voltage fluctuations within the building.

WEC CO-OP STORE

WHOLE HOUSE SURGE PROTECTION



• **Meter-base Surge Suppression Device**

protects all household appliances from storm or other electrical surges. Installed by Co-op or your contractor. Fully

warranted to cover appliances from damage.



• **OPTI 525bt Uninterruptible power system (UPS)**

Protect your computer from outages! OPTI 525bt provides up to 14 minutes of runtime (4 minutes under maximum loads). Features

two outlets, surge suppression, as well as modem/ internet and network connectors. Contact Co-op for details or visit www.washingtonelectric.coop/pages/prod.htm



Panamax Max 2 plug device:

surge suppression for two appliances. Member price

\$39.95. Special: when ordered (by May 31, 2003) with installation of whole house device, the Co-op will include (1) Max 2 free. Remember the Co-op Store now offers a full line of “point of use” surge suppressor plugs and strips.

Co-op Long Distance Telephone Service

- Reasonably priced
- No gimmicks
- Available to Co-op members
- Provided by Powernet Global
- Call 1.800.932.5245, or visit www.washingtonelectric.coop/pages/phone.htm
- **OR** call 1.866.216.0332 and switch today!

A CO-OP STORE SPECIAL! Dial-up internet service

Enjoy unlimited internet access with local dial-up for just \$17.95/month. Visit www.washingtonelectric.coop for details and sign up or call the Co-op at 1.800.932.5245 for information.



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

be damaged while connected to these surge-control products the manufacturer will fully cover the costs of replacement.

Selecting Quality Surge-Suppression Devices

Point-of-entry surge-suppression devices require installation either by the Co-op or your electrical contractor. Point-of-use devices are a simple do-it-yourself proposition. The products endorsed by the Co-op are robust and dependable, and will provide a lifetime of surge suppression.

There are many "strip" suppression devices for sale in discount and hardware stores, often at prices below those listed here. Cheaper products are not as well made as the Panamax or EFI products offered through WEC, and don't afford as

much protection for your equipment; some products, in fact, provide very little protection. When deciding how much to spend on surge protection,

Meter-base surge suppression device

consider the protected equipment's replacement cost. You may not want to trust an expensive computer or TV to a \$20 power strip.

To help members evaluate power quality (surge suppression) devices generally, these details – which should be printed on the product's package – should be considered:

- 1. Response Time:** A good surge protector acts within nanoseconds (a nanosecond is defined as a billionth of a second) to dissipate the extra heat energy caused by a power surge. Choose a product that responds in less than 1 nanosecond.
- 2. Joule Rating:** Joules (pronounced almost like "jewels") are a scientific unit for measuring energy. The higher the joule rating, the larger the surge the product can handle. If your surge protector is attached to a single, small appliance, a joule rating as low as 70 might be adequate. For higher-end equipment, especially when two or more appliances are plugged into the same surge protector, a rating of at least 1,000 joules is recommended.
- 3. Voltage Rating:** While the joule rating should be high, the voltage rating should be low. It indicates how much electricity from a sudden power spike the device will allow to pass through. Obviously, the less the better. *Consumer Reports* recommends units rated at 330 volts. Also, look for units able to absorb surges between any pair of the three wires (positive, negative and ground) in an electrical circuit. Disturbances can be routed through the neutral or ground line within a home.

For more information about surge-

suppression devices please refer to the Co-op's web page: www.washingtonco-op.com/pages/surge.htm.

Phone line protection

If a member has the recommended "belt and suspenders" – whole-house surge protection AND a selection of individual strip/plug devices – there is still one more general recommendation. It concerns the phone line into the building, another potential point of entry for outside power disturbances like lightning strikes. To protect electronic equipment that is

connected to a telephone line, such as computers and fax machines, choose a surge-suppression device specially designed to connect both to your phone line and your home's interior circuits. The packaging should provide that information. You can also call us at the Co-op for advice on appropriate devices.

UPS

For computer installations, WEC suggests you consider an uninterruptible power supply (UPS) unit. A UPS combines surge suppression and battery backup, which not only protects your computer from dangerous power surges but keeps it operating for a period of time so that you don't lose information. The UPS will also protect phone lines in and out of the connected computer. High-quality UPS devices are available through the Co-op.

Water pumps, too

Another costly and important piece of equipment owned by many Co-op members, which should also be fully protected from power surges, is a submersible water pump. Manufacturers sometimes install some minimum amount of thermal/surge protection into their equipment, but WEC recommends that members whose water pumps are located in lightning-prone locations (for example, along a ridge top) consider additional protection.

The motor protection for submersible pumps typically involves a device wired into the system and installed within the well casing (or well tile, if a spring-fed source). Contact the Co-op to discuss water pump protection issues.

Washington Electric Cooperative has provided its members with surge-protection equipment, installation services and advice, and expert technical support for years. Don't wait until after damage occurs. Contact us for surge-suppression sales and service, whatever your application may be.



Panamax Max 2 plug device



Powermax DBS+3



WEC AT WORK NEAR YOU

LINEMEN'S



CORNER

Pretty soon the Co-op's line crews will be able to get started on an eagerly awaited project: construction of a new substation to replace the obsolete facility in **South Walden**. With the green light provided by a favorable (882-81) vote by Co-op members in 2002, WEC contracted to have the site cleared, leveled and prepared last fall, and has already taken delivery of the transformers and other major equipment.

"Now we're just waiting for the steel to arrive for the structure. Then we can begin putting it all together," said Engineering & Operations Director Dan Weston. The work should start around the first of May, with the \$400,000 substation becoming operational by July. The sidelined facility will be dismantled and removed. Directly and indirectly (in some locations the power-distribution lines are linked to both the South Walden and West Danville substations) the new sub will serve 1,400 Co-op members in South Walden, **Cabot, Wheelock, Stannard, West Danville, Woodbury, East Calais and Greensboro**.

The crews are already making improvements to the major power lines, or "feeders," that will be supplied with electricity from the new substation. There are three main feeders out of the South Walden sub: Feeder No.1 carries power to Greensboro (and points in between); No.2 extends to **Joe's Pond** in West Danville; and No. 3 serves the **West Hill Pond** area in Cabot.

"We've got two crews replacing the faulty cutouts on the main lines (the 'cutouts' are fuse-housing mechanism that has caused widespread problems for the Co-op) and adding new fuse points in preparation for the completion of the substation," said Weston. "By adding fuse points we limit the number of people affected when outages occur on the lines."

Another improvement on the West Hill Pond leg involved relocating a section of line that previously traversed a swamp; it has been reconstructed along the roadside to provide better access for repairs and maintenance.

"With new, upgraded conductor (wire), replacement of the problem cutouts, and additional new fuse points, everything starts to work more in synch," said Weston. "Then, with completion of the substation this summer, the end result should be significantly improved reliability and power quality (consistent voltage levels) in that entire area."

Rebuilding here and there

Despite the demands of the South Walden project, line workers have been

able to tackle other parts of the system as well. They recently completed reconstruction of a mile and half of line along Fish Pond Road in **East Orange**, installing 32 new poles. The area was vulnerable to outages caused by wet, heavy snows, and the effects of age and deterioration on an inaccessible section of line.

"We relocated 50 percent of the line, but we rebuilt the entire line," Weston pointed out. "Even the part that still

runs cross-country is in better shape."

Meanwhile, WEC has commenced work on the distribution line serving **Gospel Hollow** in East Calais. Here, the power line will be reconstructed right where it is. This project involves setting about 20 new poles and replacing the conductor, fuses and other equipment. "It's going to necessitate occasional brief power shutoffs this summer that will affect some 25 members" said Weston. "We've sent letters to those people, and will keep them posted about the planned outages as we proceed. We cut off power for safety reasons – the protection of our staff. We know planned outages are an inconvenience to people, so we try to make them brief, with warning in advance."

Further reconstruction projects are slated for the so-called Riddle Tap in **Williamstown** and along the Jones Brook Road in **Berlin**. However, the Co-op's first obligation in warm weather is to provide power line extensions to newly constructed homes and businesses. Improvements to the system sometimes must be deferred until later in the year.

On the prowl

Look for the Brontosaurus™ to be somewhat more widely used in large right-of-way clearing projects this summer. The machine essentially consists of a powerful rotary mower attached to the crane assembly of an Excavator. WEC contracts for the service with New England Right-of-Way. The Brontosaurus™ is capable of clearing a seriously overgrown area quickly, thoroughly and safely, but it needs room to maneuver.

That is, until last fall. "Just after snow fell last year we took the Brontosaurus™ and trimmed out what they call the Girl Scout Camp Line in Washington," said Weston. "That represented the first trial of the machine on a single-phase distribution feeder on rough terrain. It did a good job, and (ROW Coordinator) Mike Myers may look to use it in some similar locations this year. But we do have a lot of narrow rights-of-way where the Brontosaurus™ simply can't be used."

Board Offers Bylaw Changes To Streamline Co-op Membership

A set of related bylaw amendments that are being proposed this year by WEC's Board of Directors would eliminate certain procedures that have traditionally been associated with becoming a member of Washington Electric Cooperative. The goal is to streamline the application process.

If affirmed by the voters in the Co-op's 2003 annual elections, the changes would eliminate the long-standing requirement that the Board formally vote to approve applications for membership in Washington Electric Cooperative. (Membership derives from an individual or a business establishing an electric account with the Co-op.) Another provision would remove the requirement that Washington Electric issue membership certificates – documents about the size of a business card – when new people join the Co-op.

The proposed amendments would also clarify certain details about joint memberships, in which two or more people – sometimes, but not always, a married couple – enter their names on an account for electric service. These changes would resolve some inconsistencies and obsolete provisions in the bylaws, and clarify the way in which joint members exercise their rights in, and responsibilities to, the Co-op.

Consider, for example, that the parties to a joint membership have only one vote between them (since they represent only one house, business or farm on the Co-op's lines). Consider, for another example, that when an account held by joint members falls so far in arrears that the Co-op must initiate action to collect, WEC needs to know who is primarily (legally) responsible. The bylaws would establish an order of precedence among the joint members: The person with his or her name appearing first on the membership listing would act for the others, unless that person were absent, in which case authority would fall to the next person listed. The Board proposes this language to clarify issues that can arise regarding joint membership in day-to-day operations of the Co-op, and potential situations such as death and inheritance, or disputes among joint members.

Changes in Co-op Land

Membership certificates, formal Board approval of new members, and joint membership are addressed in Article 1, Sections 1 and 2, of Washington Electric Cooperative's bylaws. Issuing membership certificates was standard practice when co-ops were pioneered under the Rural Electrification Act during the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration. That same

tradition applies to board approval of new members.

But times were different then. Rural people didn't move around much, so membership in the local electric co-op was fairly stable and consistent.

These days, Washington Electric Co-op sees a significant and constant turnover in membership. In July 2002, for example, 54 WEC accounts changed hands as homes were sold or new tenants moved into rental units. When you figure in newly constructed homes and businesses WEC processes some 50 to 100 new memberships a month.

This is why many electric cooperatives around the country already have stopped issuing certificates and voting to approve new memberships.

"We want to expedite the process of joining the Co-op," said Roger Fox, a member of the Board of Directors from Walden, "particularly for the benefit of our staff so they can do their work without unnecessary encumbrance."

The bylaws will retain the provisions that the Board considers important for qualifying for Co-op membership. These requirements (also in Article 1) are that applicants:

- 1) buy their electricity from Washington Electric (except for power they may produce themselves);
- 2) comply with the rules and bylaws of the Co-op.
- 3) pay a connection fee of \$10;

Adding Board acceptance after those conditions have been met has begun to seem like an archaic formality.

"These votes on membership applications are on the agenda at our Board meetings every month," said Fox. "In my 12 years we haven't rejected a single application for membership. I think it would be hard to justify such a rejection legally after people have paid their connection fees. The requirement of a formal vote amounts to bureaucratic wheel-spinning. The staff thinks, and we agree, that the Co-op and all concerned would all be better off without it."

What value certificates?

Membership certificates, in the Board's view, are similarly outdated. In an age of computerized record keeping the printed certificates no longer seem important.

"I get the sense that people don't hold onto them," said WEC General Manager Avram Patt.

In earlier times the certificates were more important.

"Probably, when rural electric co-ops were struggling to recruit enough mem-

bers to get started, there was a concern among the leaders of the movement that people would not sufficiently comprehend that the co-op belonged to them and that they had input into how it was run," said Fox. "The membership certificate was analogous to a shareholder's certificate, the purpose perhaps being to impress upon people that the co-op was a legitimate corporation and that it did in fact belong to the customers."


Washington Electric continues to emphasize the member-benefits of a cooperatively owned utility in contrast to investor-owned power companies. New members receive a Member Information Packet that contains a copy of WEC's bylaws, an explanation of cooperative ownership, tips about outages (typical causes, what to do to get help, etc.) and

other helpful facts. If proof of Co-op membership should become necessary the member's payment records would suffice. Also, the Co-op keeps extensive records for its members, including capital credit accounts, electricity usage, and payment history. In light of such documentation, certificates seem unnecessary.

The annual ballot

"We're not aware of any negative consequences for people that arise from these bylaw changes," said Fox. "They are being offered to update the Co-op in certain respects, and to make our membership services faster and more efficient."

The proposed amendments will be included on the ballot that members will receive in the weeks leading up to the May 20 Annual Meeting. The ballot will also have the names of this year's candidates for the Board of Directors. Anyone with questions about the proposed bylaw amendments can contact the Co-op or a member of the Board of Directors.

Contact information is provided on page two of this issue of *Co-op Currents*. 

Right-Of-Way Reclearing Projects Scheduled

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

For the Period Through Spring/Summer 2003

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 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 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	Line from Cutler Corner Road to Jalbert, Lyman, Taplin Hill and Cobble Hill Roads.
Cabot	Walbridge Road line to Lee Blackwell (CA 104).
Chelsea/Washington	Line from Route 110 cross country to Hart Hollow Road.
CorinthChelsea	Road from Tullar Road to Abe Jacobs Road including Abe Jacobs Rd.
Corinth	Camp Munn Road.
Corinth/Vershire	Eagle Hollow Road.
Duxbury	Birch Road Line to Edward Franz (DU 85-3-7).
Marshfield	Beaver Meadow and Pitkin Farm Rd. Line to Nancy Everhart (MAR 98).
Orange	Two Phase Line along Rt. 302 from Tucker Road to Orange Heights.
Roxbury	Winch Hill Extension at David Copeland's (RO 101-F) to Selby Jones, Bull Run (RO 76-A-1).
Walden	Line to Arthur Olney (WAL 97) Olney Road.
Walden	Lines near Maple Lane, Cobb Road & Cahoon Farm Road.
Wheelock/Stannard/Greensboro	Gonyaw Road between Route 16 and Flag Pond.
Williamstown	South Hill Road to Route 14 at Limehurst Trailer Park.
WilliamstownWilliamstown/Chelsea	Road, tap to Perry Hollyer (WIL 225).