

NOVEC *Cooperative* Living



A FISH STORY

PAGE 10

Dr. Shawn Young on
the Rapidan River bridge
with the Rapidan Mill and
dam in the background.

PHOTO BY GREGG MACDONALD



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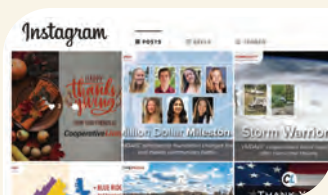
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VIEWPOINT

Happy New Year!

It's hard to believe we are already in 2025.

This past year was jam-packed with *Cooperative Living* content, including interesting articles, new features, great pictures, and plenty of recipes for everyone to enjoy. Hopefully, you had a chance to experience something new this holiday season, like a living Christmas tree cantata.

The Jan.-Feb. issue of *Cooperative Living* has something for everyone, including our Cooperative Focus feature on an effort to increase fish populations in Virginia's Rapidan River. This effort is a great example of how a public/private partnership with a common goal can positively impact the local environment.

The electric cooperatives had a chance to start a Girl Power



Camp four years ago, and it has grown into one of our biggest outreaches. It has expanded to a second location in Maryland, so be sure to check out the article to see how it has touched the lives of the young women who participated, the cooperatives and our associate members.

It's time for the state legislatures to return, so we've included access to our digital legislative guides and an interactive map to help you find your state and federal legislators. This issue also includes an article about cooperatives focusing on resources to meet tomorrow's electricity reliability demands.

We are so blessed to be able to bring *Cooperative Living* into your home and look forward to bringing you even more engaging content in 2025. We want to wish everyone a happy and healthy New Year! ●

Brian S. Mosier, President & CEO
Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives

CooperativeLiving

VOL. 80, NO. 2 • ISSN 1529-4579

OUR MISSION

To inform you about your cooperative and its efforts to serve your energy needs; how to use electricity safely and efficiently; and the people who define and enhance the quality of life in communities served by electric co-ops.

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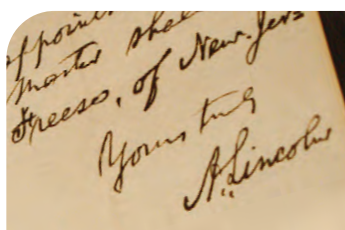
For editorial inquiries, contact editorial@co-opliving.com.

COOPERATIVE LIVING (USPS 473-300) is published 10 times a year, monthly except for combined January-February and November-December issues, by the VMD Association of Electric Cooperatives. POSTMASTER, address changes should be sent to: Cooperative Living, 4201 Dominion Blvd., Suite 101, Glen Allen, VA 23060, 804-346-3344. Periodicals Postage paid at Glen Allen, VA, and additional mailing offices. Subscription: \$6.09 per year for members of subscribing co-ops; \$10 per year for all others.

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PHOTOS BY GREGG MACDONALD

Two Score and Seven Years Ago ...

Abraham Lincoln museum celebrates 47th anniversary

by Gregg MacDonald, Staff Writer

WHAT DO COLONEL HARLAND SANDERS AND PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN HAVE IN COMMON BESIDES NOTABLE FACIAL HAIR? For starters, they are both connected to the Lincoln Memorial University Library and Museum in Harrogate, Tenn., part of Powell Valley Electric Cooperative's service area.

The museum was established in 1977, but LMU has a much longer history, dating back to Feb. 12, 1897, a date that would have been Lincoln's 88th birthday. "LMU has maintained a Lincoln collection far longer than it has had the museum," says Michael Lynch, the museum's director. "For many years, the collection was displayed in the Lincoln Room of [LMU's] Duke Hall, but there wasn't enough space to showcase everything. Colonel Sanders, the founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken, made a generous donation that enabled the museum's construction, and the grand opening took place in 1977."

Both the museum and the university are located in the shadow of the historic Cumberland Gap. According to LMU, Tennessee was divided between the Union and the Confederacy during the Civil War. Loyalty to the Union was especially prevalent in the state's mountainous northeast region. Cumberland Gap, situated at the convergence of Union Kentucky and Confederate Tennessee and Virginia, was a key defensive position for the Confederacy and a prime avenue of invasion for the North. The Cumberland Gap pass changed hands four times throughout the Civil War.

Lincoln wanted to reward the loyalty of the East Tennessee Union supporters, who had remained devoted to the Union despite suffering persecution at the hands of the Confederacy. "They are loyal there ...," Lincoln is credited with saying about the region.

A vision of starting a university honoring Lincoln there was the foundation for LMU, which was chartered in 1897. According to LMU, due to the school's connection to Lincoln and the Civil War, supporters quickly began donating books, manuscripts, firearms, uniforms and various other items.

By the mid-1970s, the collection had outgrown the Lincoln Room, prompting LMU trustees to plan the construction of a building devoted to preserving and exhibiting its historical materials. It was at this time that Colonel Sanders contributed significantly to making the library and museum a reality.

Today, the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum is a 21,000-square-foot facility that houses one of the most significant private collections of Abraham Lincoln and Civil War materials. It is shared with the community and the public at large. ●

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Four Years and Climbing

Co-ops attract more than 80 female students to career camps

by Jim Robertson, Staff Writer



Journeyman lineworker Genevieve Boarman provides instruction to a student climbing a utility pole.



Young women throughout the Delmarva region challenged their determination to reach new heights at this year's Girl Power Camp, hosted by the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives, its member cooperatives and generous industry partners.

More than 80 determined young women participated in this year's interactive experience at two locations. An inaugural Eastern Shore camp was held at the Choptank Electric Cooperative regional service center on Oct. 3 in Salisbury, Md. The VMDAEC Training Center hosted the fourth annual camp on Oct. 30.

Girl Power introduces students to a variety of career paths in the energy industry, including linework.

"This event is incredible because it's so hands-on," says Jess Perego, career and technical education director for Greene County Schools. She explains that students are often only spectators on typical school field trips. The interactive design of Girl Power uniquely allows students the ability to perform tasks just like the professionals leading them.

More than 30 high schools and technical centers participated in this year's events. Educators appreciate the interactive and engaging structure of Girl Power, saying the hands-on interactions are an invaluable learning experience.



Allison Helleburg, regional manager for Hilti, instructs students using power tools to construct and attach a crossarm to a utility pole.

The initiative attracted more than 40 representatives from 10 Virginia electric cooperatives to the Palmyra camp and nearly 50 volunteers from four co-ops in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia to the Eastern Shore camp. Leading and instructing students through the climbing portion of the camp were Genevieve Boarman from Northern Neck Electric Cooperative, and Megan Simmons from Delaware Electric Cooperative. Boarman, who participated for her fourth year and instructed at both camps, recently completed her four-year apprenticeship of classroom instruction and 8,000 hours of training on the job. Simmons is currently halfway through her apprenticeship.

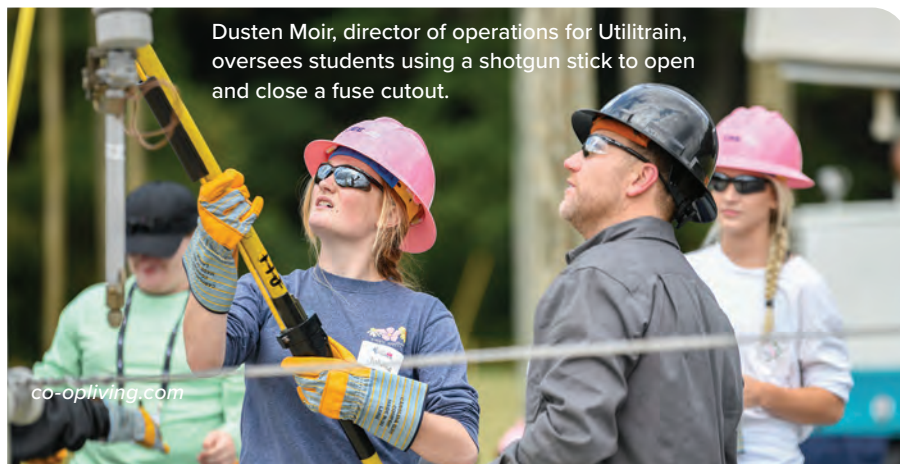
"I never really thought I can't do this just because I'm a girl," says Delilah Ray Roop, a Warren County School senior and Rappahannock Electric Cooperative member who was attending her third Girl Power camp. "I want to be a lineman, and they have genuinely helped me so much, pushed me in the right

direction. I know exactly what I'm going to do, when I'm going to do it, and how I'm going to do it because they've helped so much."

Students rotated through interactive stations led by industry professionals. They performed tasks like climbing a utility pole, using a shotgun stick, attaching a crossarm to a pole, operating a drone, splicing fiber and operating a bucket truck boom. Students were able to use power tools with supervision from tool manufacturers, participate in a cadwelding exercise, and perform simulated real-life tasks of a lineworker via virtual reality.

This event would not be possible without the incredible and generous support from a variety of industry partners each year. Their expertise and willingness to share it help make Girl Power a successful and engaging experience.

Three students from this year's camp have indicated intent to apply for the Southside Virginia Community College Power Line Worker Program this coming summer to pursue careers in utility linework. All three are eligible to receive scholarships from Altec Industries. The VMDAEC Education Scholarship Foundation also has scholarship opportunities for students whose primary residence is served by an electric cooperative in Virginia, Maryland or Delaware. ●



Dusten Moir, director of operations for Utilitrain, oversees students using a shotgun stick to open and close a fuse cutout.

Power Up Your Core

A workout for lineworkers and everyone else

by Vanessa LaFaso Stolarski, Contributing Columnist

In the world of electric cooperatives, we're always talking about power — generating it, distributing it and maintaining it. But today, let's discuss a different kind of power: the strength and flexibility of your body's core, specifically trunk rotation. For lineworkers and other field personnel, this often-overlooked aspect of fitness can be the key to staying safe and injury-free on the job.

Trunk rotation refers to your torso's ability to twist from side to side. It's what allows you to reach for tools in your bucket, maneuver around power poles, and perform countless other tasks that keep our grid running smoothly. Without good rotational strength and range of motion, you're more likely to strain muscles or injure your back when performing these duties.

The good news is you don't need any specialized equipment to improve your trunk rotation. The following movements can be done almost

anywhere and can help lineworkers and others perform better on the job and in their personal lives.

STANDING TRUNK ROTATIONS

Stand with feet shoulder-width apart and knees slightly bent. Hold hands together in front of you as if gripping an invisible tool. Keeping your hips facing forward, slowly rotate your upper body to the right as far as is comfortable. Hold for a second, then rotate to the left. Increase intensity by holding a heavy tool or dumbbell while you perform it. That's one repetition. Aim for 2-3 sets of 10-15 reps.

SEATED SPINAL TWIST

Sit on a chair or in your truck seat. Place your left hand on the outside of your right knee. Gently twist your torso to the right, using your left arm for leverage. Hold for 15-30 seconds, then switch sides.

SUPINE TRUNK ROTATION

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the ground. Extend

your arms out to the sides. Keeping your shoulders flat, slowly lower your knees to the right side. Hold for a few seconds, then bring them back to center and lower to the left side. Aim for 2-3 sets of 10-15 reps.

TOOL BELT ROTATIONAL LIFTS

Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, holding a light tool belt or similar weight at chest level. Rotate your torso to the left, lowering the weight toward your left hip. Then, in a controlled motion, rotate to the right while lifting the weight diagonally across your body to shoulder height. Aim for 2-3 sets of 10-15 reps, then switch sides.

Incorporating these exercises into your daily routine can help strengthen your abs and back while also increasing overall fitness. Aim to do them 3-4 times per week, either as a warm-up before your shift or as a cool-down after.

Safety is always a top priority in the electrical maintenance world, and that includes the physical well-being of our workforce. By focusing on trunk rotation, we're not just maintaining the power grid — we're empowering the team to work more safely and efficiently. ●

Vanessa LaFaso Stolarski is a certified nutrition counselor, weightlifting coach, life coach and stress-management specialist.

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Trunk rotation refers to your torso's ability to twist from side to side.

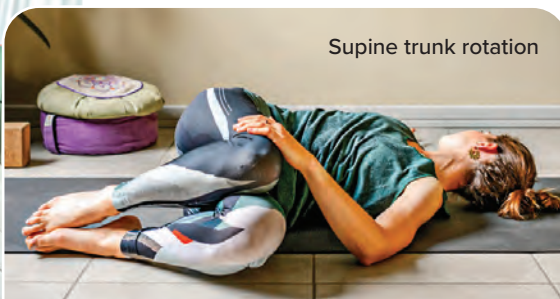
Seated spinal twist



Standing trunk rotation



Supine trunk rotation



SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest—but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

We found a limited supply of turquoise from Arizona and purchased it for our *Sedona Turquoise Collection*. Inspired by the work of those ancient craftsmen and designed to showcase the exceptional blue stone, each stabilized vibrant cabochon features a unique, one-of-a-kind matrix surrounded in Bali metalwork. You could drop over \$1,200 on a turquoise pendant, or you



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Michael and Rita Hodges continue their family's nearly 250-year forestry legacy.

Century Forests

Celebrating Virginia's forestry heritage

by Alice Kemp, Virginia Farm Bureau Federation

John and Patricia Haile stand in front of the Century Forest that has been in their family since 1844.

Tucked among Virginia's 16 million acres of forestland are rich stories of stewardship and family dedication to the land.

"The Virginia Century Forest Program was established to honor individuals and families whose working forests have been in the same family for 100 years or more," explains Jennifer Leach, Virginia Department of Forestry program coordinator.

"It's important to recognize families who have made long-term commitments to enhancing the environment and protecting the quality of life for their fellow Virginians through forestry," she says.

In Henry County, the Hodges family land dates to the American Revolution.

"The land grant was for two parcels — one for 535 acres and another for 300 acres," says Michael Hodges, who owns Hemlock Haven Farm with his brother, Jim. "They were signed in 1781 by Thomas Jefferson, who was governor then."

Michael and his wife, Rita, live on the remaining 213 acres, 100 of which comprise a Century Forest. The forest's pines and hardwoods have been integral to the family's livelihood for seven generations. The timber has been used to build family homes, barns and fences, and it has also fueled hearths through cold winters.

Today, the family maintains a stewardship plan to conserve woodlands,

fencing cattle from streams, planting buffers and creating wildlife habitats. Timber is sustainably harvested and replanted every few decades.

ENJOYING NATURE

And beyond the family business, the forest is a place for respite.

"We walk the trails and hike the woods," Rita says. "We like to take the dogs through the woods ... just to get out, see it and enjoy it."

Michael says it's their responsibility to keep the family's 250-year heritage going. "My brother and I each have kids — the eighth generation is in waiting."

To the east, in Essex County, John and Patricia Haile's land started as a wedding present in 1844.

"John's great-great-grandfather was getting married, and his father, Capt. Robert Gaines Haile, bought [Elton Farm] for him," Patricia says.

That marked the beginning of a 80-year farming and forestry legacy on the 304-acre property, which includes over 100 acres of hardwoods and pines.

"There was a sawmill on the property until 1950," John recalls. "My father cut black walnut trees, milled them into railroad ties, and sold them to the railroad."

The timberland now serves as a sanctuary for livestock — shading them on hot days and providing shelter during calving season. The Hailes work with foresters to thin trees and harvest timber.

"It's a renewable resource and does a lot for our environment," Patricia notes.

The Haile's Century Forest also symbolizes times of resilience.

"Fifty acres of the property had an improved stand of pines that was first planted by the Civilian Conservation Corps," John says. To recover from the Great Depression and to help weather hard economic times, then-President Franklin Roosevelt established a program that hired millions of unemployed young men for conservation work. "And planting trees was one of their jobs." ●

Virginia Century Forest FACTS & STATS



- Virginia has the nation's first century forest program.
- The state has 59 Century Forests, ranging from 100 to 286 years old.
- Participating forestland owners must have a minimum of 20 contiguous acres of managed forest.
- The forested land on Century Forests ranges from 25 acres to 2,593 acres, with an average of 237 acres.

► Learn more about the Virginia Century Forest Program at bit.ly/3uregyo.

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Dr. Shawn Young joined the Rapidan Institute in the summer of 2024 to lead the Rapidan Fish Passage Project.

Breaking Down Barriers

Rapidan River project seeks to increase local fish populations

by Jeff Poole, Contributing Writer

For more than two centuries, a dam across the Rapidan River in Central Virginia was an economic imperative. It propelled manufacturing and commerce by altering the river's flow.

But five years ago, the dam's current stewards, the nonprofit American Climate Partners, began considering the aging dam's viability in the modern marketplace. After all, it had been nearly 60 years since the dam powered a milling operation in this rural community encompassing Orange and Culpeper counties, and a more recent, 10-year hydropower effort had proved financially unsuccessful.



GETTING STARTED

With a mix of public and private partners, ACP launched the Rapidan Institute to lead a comprehensive river restoration study to evaluate the contemporary utility of the 88-year-old concrete dam and the potential environmental and economic benefits of altering it.

In May 2024, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced a \$7.9 million grant to fund the Institute's study results, which became known as the Rapidan Fish Passage Project.

The project is one of more than 45 projects receiving nearly \$240 million to reopen migratory pathways and restore access to healthy habitat for fish nationwide through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act.

The project would remove all or part of the Rapidan Mill dam straddling the Orange and Culpeper County lines and restore habitat along the Rapidan River in the lower Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Removing the dam would open more than 500 miles — and as many as 1,000 miles — of habitat for American shad, river herring and other migratory fish.

"Rapidan, Orange County and Culpeper County are going to be ground-zero for restoration of the shad population in the mid-Atlantic," ACP Executive Director Michael Collins suggests. "Before dams and river pollution, American shad were the most valuable and important fish in the Chesapeake Bay, and the Rapidan Mill dam has been identified as the top practicable dam removal project in the bay's basin. This is a project of national significance."

Collins says the balance of the

project — and the bulk of the funding — will be spent implementing the approved design, including site preparation and safety, dam removal, mill bank stabilization, and riverbank stabilization and restoration, both above and below the dam.

SOMEBODY GET ME A DOCTOR

ACP has already taken the first substantial step toward this goal by appointing Dr. Shawn Young as

the director of the Rapidan Institute and project lead.

For 30 years, Young has worked with various agencies, academics, scientists and stakeholders on fish

passage, aquaculture, environmental and habitat restoration projects. With a master's degree and a doctorate in fisheries sciences from Clemson University, Young brings a background of applied research and field implementation to the Rapidan project.

Having spent his career working in habitat restoration and fish population restoration and recovery, Young has worked the last 13 years in the Pacific Northwest where communities weighed the effects of dam removal and eventually voted in favor of healthier salmon populations.



A HISTORY OF CONCERN

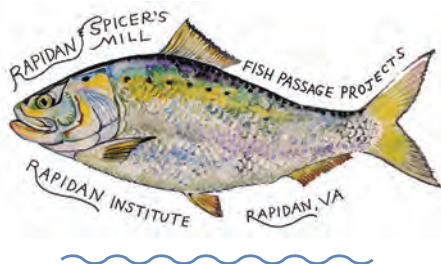
Maintaining a healthy fish population is not a new subject in Virginia either. For more than 250 years, Rapidan-area residents and their upstream neighbors have weighed the benefits of damming the river for economic benefits against ecological advantage — so much so that colonial legislators even addressed the issue in 1759 noting that both mill and dam owners needed to provide a fish passageway at least 10 feet wide over dams to provide access for migrating fish.

"Later in October 1788, that act was repealed by the General Assembly because the original act was not serving the purpose for which it was intended," says Virginia Headwaters Council Historian Raymond Ezell. "Similar laws ensuring the passage of fish across dams and other river obstructions were enacted for almost every major river in Virginia during the 18th century. This attests to the historical importance of riverine fisheries across the commonwealth and the commitment of the Virginia legislature to preserving them and assuring their viability."

SAVING THE SHAD

In Virginia, over time, economic

(continued on page 12)



Breaking Down Barriers

(continued from page 11)

interests prevailed — which was good news for local farmers and merchants but not for shad, which historically had been plentiful throughout the inland rivers and streams of the mid-Atlantic.

Currently, the 11-foot-high, 12-foot-deep and 200-foot-wide concrete Rapidan Mill dam blocks migrating shad, river herring, striped bass, eels and other fish from native spawning and rearing grounds upstream. Specifically, American shad, hickory shad, alewife and blueback herring are migratory species that spend most of their lives in saltwater but must return to freshwater to spawn. For the eels, Young says it's all about free access to rearing habitat since they are spawned in the Sargasso Sea and then find their way into freshwater systems to grow for up to 20 years before returning to the

Dr. Shawn Young with a striped bass, one of the many species of fish he says are blocked from native spawning and rearing grounds by the Rapidan Mill dam.

ocean to complete their life cycle.

“A healthy river requires a healthy fishery and, by extension, a healthy Chesapeake Bay requires a healthy Rapidan River,” Collins adds.

The Rapidan meanders from its headwaters in the Blue Ridge Mountains through the Virginia Piedmont, connecting various streams, creeks and tributaries before emptying into the Rappahannock River west of Fredericksburg. The Rappahannock widens as it wanders eastward to the Chesapeake Bay.

“Shad are the foundation of the food chain in the Rapidan and essential to a healthy river and surrounding habitat.

Removing the dam — or part of the dam — will open an area where these fish haven't been able to go for more than 200 years,” Collins says.

Collins, who has a background in historic preservation, says he appreciates the challenge of improving the river's habitat and eco-system

American Climate Partners is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization working since 2006 to restore the health of people, communities and ecosystems. It designs, creates and manages projects, programs and businesses for rural America to provide natural solutions to restore climate and biodiversity. It is headquartered in the Rapidan Mill in Central Virginia.



by altering a defining community characteristic.

“I don't think those things have to be mutually exclusive. The fact that there's been a mill and dam here for more than 200 years is not lost on us and, working with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and a preservation consultant, we'll do everything practicable and reasonable to preserve that history. It's possible we may be able to save parts of the dam while creating the fish passage. That's just one of many studies we'll do over the next 12 to 18 months.”

BREAKING IT DOWN

The \$7.9 million NOAA grant application divides the project into five phases over four years. During the first year, ACP and its contractor — Ecotone LLC — will refine data, studies and analysis of site conditions, resources, opportunities and constraints in advance of project design. As part of the preliminary project studies, ACP will engage with adjacent landowners, stakeholders and the community through public outreach efforts. No demolition, construction or restoration will occur during the first year while studies are completed.

ACP also has partnered with the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources for assistance with preliminary work regarding sediment and fisheries sampling. DWR has



PHOTOS COURTESY AMERICAN CLIMATE PARTNERS/RAPIDAN INSTITUTE

been monitoring migrating fish in the Rappahannock River system for decades and will track the progress of migratory fish expansion once a free-flowing Rapidan River is restored.

A similar experience closer to home has Rapidan Fish Passage Project organizers optimistic about the impact of the upcoming project. In 2004, when the Embrey Dam was removed from the Rappahannock River downstream from the Rapidan Mill dam, DWR fisheries' biologists documented hundreds of hickory shad and even some American shad migrating through the rubble even before the dam was removed entirely.

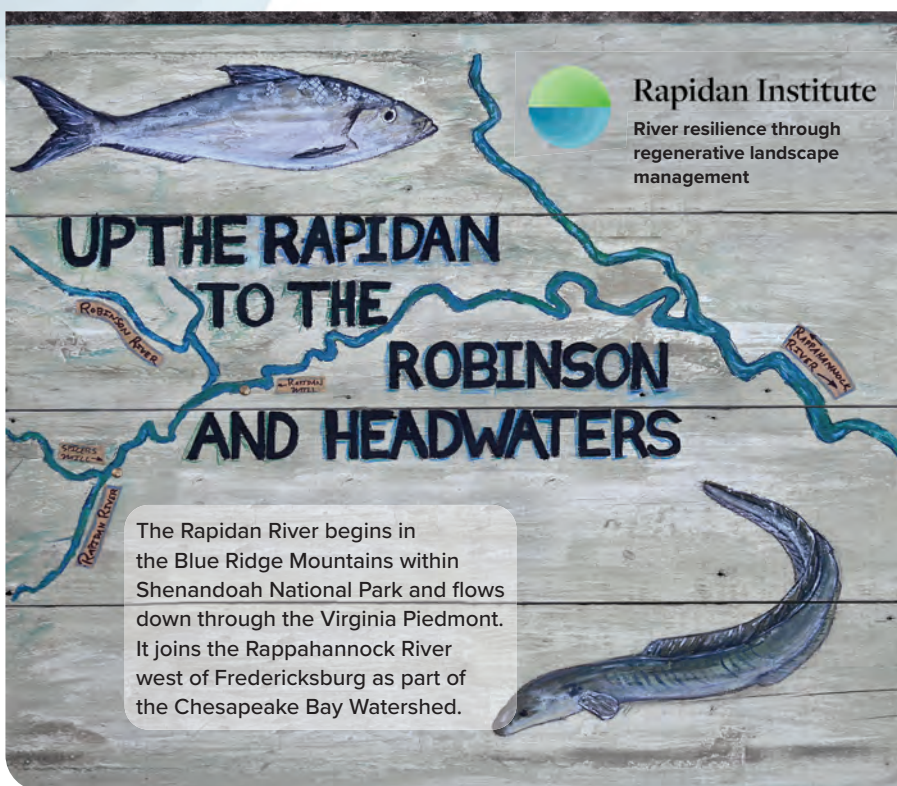
That experience and other dam removal success stories throughout Virginia illustrate the opportunity for the Rapidan Fish Passage Project to develop a more modern balance between the natural and human coexistence in the area.

"The fish populations have been in decline for a long time, but they were historically critical to the survival of indigenous peoples, colonial settlers and early Americans. It was no accident people settled and lived here," says Young. "American shad, striped bass, river herring, eels are important not only because they go out to the bay and are eaten by other fish, but also because they're essential to the mussels and other amphibians and organisms in fresh water rivers and streams. Those other organisms have their own

histories and strategies for survival that rely on the shad and other fish. Dams and other obstacles over the years have blocked that dynamic and are one of the leading causes for fish population declines."

MUTUAL BENEFIT

Removing structures that no longer stimulate active economic activity can both improve the ecosystem and yield residual economic benefits through



recreation, Young suggests. Whereas the dam once was an essential element in maximizing the economic impact of the river, removing it may be the modern equivalent. In that case, the natural and human worlds both benefit, he notes.

"These structures, these places are historic. They're part of the fabric of the community. We understand that, and it's important. Shad, stripers,

herring, eel have also been part of that history. It's difficult to say which is more important — the natural or human history — they're both important and intertwined, but they're starting to separate," Young says. "These dams were vitally important in earlier times, but they're not anymore. We need to change the paradigm of absolute and complete control of something to a more sustainable middle ground. Dam removal is an effective and

affordable way to do that."

Achieving that "middle ground" may be less quantifiable, but more intrinsically valuable.

"Professionally, we think this could make a huge difference. That's why we're pursuing it," Young explains. "Everybody knows nature is not that healthy now. Fish populations have been declining and continue to decline. But just knowing that the rivers and the fish populations are healthy — even for those who don't fish or eat fish — it provides optimism. Removing the dam is a minor part, really, but when you add the benefit to the Rapidan and the Rappahannock, and put it together with what folks are doing on the James and the York rivers, the impact is significant on one of the most historically productive ecosystems in the world." ●

► For additional information on ACP and the Rapidan Fish Passage Project, visit americanclimatepartners.org or contact Dr. Shawn Young at shawn@americanclimatepartners.org.

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ODEC Old Dominion Electric Cooperative

NOVEC PREDICTS CHALLENGES AND GROWTH IN 2025



Happy New Year and best wishes for a safe and prosperous 2025!

Your Cooperative heads into the new year with solid financials and best-in-class reliability. We continue to serve the growing data center market with record engineering, procurement, and construction activity. NOVEC employees remain focused on our mission of providing safe, reliable, and affordable energy. Whether it's providing timely outage restoration, processing accurate monthly bills, or getting power to your new home, we want to exceed your expectations for quality service every day.

The coming year will not be without challenges, though, as Virginia energy policy remains problematic. Our area is experiencing record growth in consumer demand for electricity, but that demand is not being matched by development of new base load generation or large renewable energy resources here in Virginia. Additionally, older generating units are being retired due to their age and environmental impact. In the near term, we anticipate that NOVEC customers will see power supply costs rise as insufficient local power generation causes regional capacity market costs to increase the wholesale price of electricity.

More details on the increase in the Power Cost Adjustment on your bill is included in this magazine and on the NOVEC website. I am convinced this is a short-term financial burden and will not become a reliability issue. However, the solution is extremely complex and requires all parties — elected officials, regulators, advocacy groups, electric utilities, and ratepayers — to collaborate and cooperate on a reasonable and practical energy policy for Virginians.

Our safety reminder this month is about winter driving. Whether the roads are dusted with snow or covered with harder-to-recognize black ice, please take your time. Ensure your vehicles have good tread on the tires, and always clean off your vehicle before a trip.

Best Regards,

Dave Schleicher

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For updates, tips on safety, energy saving ideas, and career information, find us on social media or go to novec.com.

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ENERGY TIP OF THE MONTH

Consider replacing your existing heating system if any of the following are true: your furnace or boiler is more than 15 years old; your equipment needs frequent repairs; your energy bills are going up; or some rooms in your home are too hot or too cold.






Apply for college scholarships from NOVEC

2025 scholarship applications open Feb. 1


APPLICATIONS ARE DUE APRIL 1


Scholarships are awarded to students living on NOVEC lines in Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun, Prince William, Stafford counties, and the City of Manassas Park.





Don't delay, get your applications in today!

www.novec.com/scholarships

 **Academic Requirements**
Applicants must be graduating seniors with a GPA of 3.5 or higher and provide two letters of recommendation.

 **Outside of School**
Applicants must demonstrate some form of extracurricular activities. Examples include: community service, work experience, and leadership responsibilities.

 **Career-Specific Scholarship**
NOVEC offers one scholarship for a graduating senior who plans on attending a vocational or trade school.

 **Other Scholarship Opportunities**
A scholarship is also available for a private/home-school student and one student who plans to attend a Historically Black College or University.

Where Are They Now?

NOVEC Catches Up with Former College Scholarship Recipients

By Robin Earl

THIS STORY IS THE FIRST IN A TWO-PART SERIES.

Every year NOVEC awards college scholarships to high school seniors. We tracked down some of our past winners and asked them how the college experience expanded their horizons.



As a first-year student at Washington University in St. Louis School of Medicine, Erin Davisson is working toward her doctorate in audiology.

Erin Davisson, 23, has earned her “white coat” on the way to becoming an audiologist. She graduated in 2020 from Patriot High School and was valedictorian in her 2024 graduating class at James Madison University (JMU). She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in communication sciences and disorders, with minors in honors interdisciplinary studies, medical Spanish, and Latin American, Latinx, and Caribbean studies. While completing research at JMU, she “fell in love with the vestibular (balance) side of audiology.” As a first-year student at Washington University in St. Louis School of Medicine, she is working toward her doctorate in audiology.

Erin Dolan, 22, graduated from Saint John Paul the Great Catholic High School in 2020 and the University of Virginia with a degree in kinesiology in 2023. Dolan is a first-year doctoral student in the physical therapy program at West Virginia University’s School of Medicine. Dolan’s father passed away during her first year of college. “While I could go on and on about how this life event changed my life, I would simply like to share the importance of enjoying the little moments in life. To ‘stop and smell the roses’ has been overshared, but it represents the deep breaths, the smiles, or the sunsets that reset us and allow us to keep moving forward.”

Sahil Dharamsi, 23, is currently working on a master’s degree at the Georgia Institute of Technology. He is a graduate of Osbourne Park High School (2019) and George Mason University (2023). Dharamsi is working as a security engineer, a natural move after his concentration in cybersecurity engineering in college. Since high school, Dharamsi has developed a deep interest in Formula 1 racing; he enjoys traveling to new countries and playing pickleball.



Jet Hayes stands at the Argentinian “End of the World” post office located at Ensenada Zaratiegui in Tierra del Fuego National Park.

John “Jet” Hayes, 24, graduated from Brooke Point High School in 2018 and earned a Master of Business Administration degree from Shenandoah University in 2024; he is currently working in government contracting. He said that through Shenandoah University’s Global Citizenship Project, “I was able to visit Argentina in the spring of 2024. I learned so much about the country, met some amazing people, and am extremely grateful for the experience.”



Ben Kelly is currently working as a health actuary in the insurance field.

Ben Kelly, 22, graduated from the University of Virginia in 2023, after getting his diploma from Manassas Park High School in 2019. He is currently working as a health actuary in the insurance field. He said, “It is not the field I expected to be working in heading into college, as I didn’t even know it existed.” Kelly said that during his second year at UVA, he took a year-long advanced calculus and linear algebra course. “At the time, I was still undecided on my major, and this class was the primary factor in my decision to major in mathematics.” He learned about actuary work as a math major, and landed his current job through an internship.



Nathan Lam deadlifts 585 pounds, his personal best.

Nathan Lam, 21, is on track to achieve his dream of working as an orthodontist. Lam graduated from Manassas Park High School in 2021. He earned a degree in biology from the University of Pittsburgh Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences, and is currently a first-year dental student at the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine. Lam also competes in and coaches the sport of powerlifting. Through this new interest, he said, “I have found some of my best friends and mentors and have learned to push myself ... Although they seem quite unrelated, I truly feel the lessons I’ve learned from lifting weights in the gym have led to success in the classroom and vice versa.”



Lydia Kang, a 2023 graduate of Wheaton College, recently completed a Fulbright Scholarship as an English teaching assistant in Spain.

Battlefield High School graduate (2019) **Lydia Kang** recently completed a Fulbright Scholarship as an English teaching assistant in Spain. As an international relations major at Wheaton College (Class of 2023), she said she used her education as a bridge between cultures. Expanding on that theme, Kang worked last summer as an intern at a humanitarian aid field office in Hanoi, Vietnam. “This was the first time I had ever been in Asia, and as an Asian-American, everything felt foreign but familiar ... I learned a lot about resilience and hospitality from my Vietnamese coworkers, saw what working in humanitarian aid looked like in the field, and grew in courage (especially riding motorbikes everywhere!), adaptability, and cross-cultural competency.”

NOVEC Lineworkers Restore Power in Hurricane-Ravaged Communities

By Robin Earl



Left to right, NOVEC's Chris Fasenmyer, Zach Bell, Kyle Sarvis, Aaron Church, and Robbie Studds left Northern Virginia Sept. 27 to help other electric co-ops with power restoration after Hurricane Helene.

Electric cooperatives in the southeastern U.S. faced heartbreaking challenges in the wake of Hurricane Helene in September. More than four million households, 1.4 million of which were co-op households, lost power in the devastating storm. Dealing with catastrophic infrastructure losses and war zone-like logistical hurdles, 10 NOVEC lineworkers joined thousands of others from affected areas and nearby states to restore power.

NOVEC deployed two teams to help three cooperatives get the lights back on. Five NOVEC lineworkers, including Chris Fasenmyer, Zach Bell, Kyle Sarvis, Aaron Church, and Robbie Studds, left their families Sept. 27 to travel to Powell Valley Electric Cooperative in southwestern Virginia. Several days later, the team traveled to Blue Ridge Energy in Lenoir, North Carolina, to assist there.

A second team of four lineworkers: Hunter Partlow, Brandon Fisher, Ben Williams, and Anthony Helsley, arrived Oct. 1 in New Castle, Virginia, to assist Craig-Botetourt Electric Cooperative. They left the next day to travel to join the first NOVEC crew at Blue Ridge Energy. Mauricio Paz also traveled to Blue Ridge to shore up that crew.

"NOVEC's crew worked hard getting the lights on," said NOVEC Construction Manager Mark DeChristopher. "They faced difficult conditions but felt good because they were able to help wherever they were needed." Before heading home, the 10-man, nine-truck crew was sent to the Blue Ridge Energy's Sparta, North Carolina office.

Their efforts aligned with one of the seven Cooperative Principles that NOVEC follows: "Cooperation among Cooperatives."



NOVEC HELPS members and other NOVEC employees worked four-hour shifts to spruce up the Willing Warriors Retreat in Haymarket.

Annual NOVEC HELPS Day of Caring Benefits Willing Warriors Retreat

By Jenny Shaskan

NOVEC employees partnered with NOVEC Hands Engaged in Local Public Service (HELPS) for the sixth annual Day of Caring, Oct. 26 at the Willing Warriors Retreat in Haymarket. NOVEC HELPS is a NOVEC-supported, employee-run 501(c)(3).

Since its opening in 2015, the Willing Warriors Retreat at Bull Run has served as a temporary home away from home for service members who are recovering at Walter Reed Medical Center or Fort Belvoir Hospital. The retreat provides veterans and their families with a relaxing environment where they can bond and create long-lasting memories away from the hospital environment.

More than 30 NOVEC HELPS volunteers worked in two shifts — landscaping, gardening, cleaning, and completing house projects. NOVEC HELPS also made a monetary donation to Willing Warriors.

“NOVEC HELPS is proud to partner with Willing Warriors for the Day of Caring,” said NOVEC HELPS Chair

and NOVEC Quality Assurance and Training Coordinator Nan Musick. “Working at the retreat is a small way of showing our appreciation to U.S. service members while honoring them and their families for the sacrifices they’ve made.”

The helping hands were appreciated. “Having volunteers like those from NOVEC at the Warrior Retreat at Bull Run allows us to continue providing vital services to our nation’s wounded warriors and their families,” said Faith Lillemo, Willing Warriors administrator and volunteer coordinator. “Their support helps create a peaceful, welcoming environment where healing and meaningful connections can take place. Volunteer efforts like this are the lifeblood of our mission, enabling us to offer these heroes a much-needed respite and a sense of community during their stay.”

The Willing Warriors Retreat is always looking for volunteers. Visit willingwarriors.org.

To learn more about NOVEC HELPS, or to donate, visit novechelps.org.



Left to right, NOVEC employees Aleyda Rojas, Marline Melendez, Brigitte Adkins, and Blanca Mora trim and separate roots for planting.



John Rainey works on an outside project at the facility's pole barn.



Kim Case-Timberlake and Nan Musick work in gardens at the Willing Warriors Retreat in Haymarket during the sixth annual Day of Caring.

Adjustment To Power Cost Adjustment Rider

By Lisa Hooker

Because NOVEC's 2025 projected wholesale energy costs are expected to increase in the coming 12 months, the Cooperative is modifying its power cost adjustment (PCA) on customers' electric bills.

Effective Jan. 1, 2025, the PCA applicable to residential and commercial accounts will be a credit of \$0.008 per kilowatt hour (kWh). A residential customer using 1,000 kWh per month could expect to see a PCA credit of \$8 per month. While still a credit, the 2025 PCA monthly credit is less than the 2024 credit of \$18.35 per month. The adjustment is driven by cost increases for generation capacity and transmission service that are largely outside of NOVEC's control.

PJM Interconnection is the regional transmission organization that coordinates wholesale electricity in Virginia, 12 other states, and the District of Columbia.

Purchased power costs are on the rise, because PJM is facing challenges with electric generation and load growth. Insufficient electric generation resources in the Virginia area of PJM's territory require power to be brought in from areas with excess generation. That's driving up capacity market costs. Delivery of this energy to large regional electric loads also is increasing transmission expenses.

State law prevents NOVEC from earning a margin (profit) on power it purchases for delivery to its customers. Each fall, NOVEC forecasts its energy costs and the amount of energy customers will

use the next year. While thoroughly researched, it is not unusual for forecasts to differ from actual wholesale power costs. NOVEC is required to reconcile the difference, and the reconciliation occurs the following year through the PCA line item on customers' monthly bills. The PCA can be a credit or a charge. Periodic changes ensure actual purchased power costs are recovered without any margin (profit).

As a not-for-profit electric utility, NOVEC's rates and terms of service are regulated by Virginia's State Corporation Commission.

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KEEPING LIFE BRIGHT

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NOVEC Celebrates Bioenergy Day

By Lisa Hooker

National Bioenergy Day, held in October each year, acknowledges the environmental and economic benefits of bioenergy — using organic materials to generate clean, renewable energy. NOVEC hosted a celebration on Oct. 23 at its Biomass Electric Generating Facility in South Boston. Nearly 100 visitors from the logging and forestry industries took tours of the plant and heard remarks from Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Matt Lohr, U.S. Department of Agriculture Director of Cooperative Forestry Steven Koehn, Virginia Tech Associate Professor Dr. Scott Barrett, and Executive Director of the American Biomass Energy Association Carrie Annand.

NOVEC's biomass plant recently celebrated its 10-year anniversary. Its 49.9-megawatt capacity provides enough renewable energy to power the equivalent of 27,475 homes. Bioenergy produces about 5.75% of the nation's energy supply.

Annand said in her remarks that biomass punches way above its weight as an energy source. "Biomass takes the leftovers from forestry, usually within 75 miles of the facility. It puts that waste to work and adds value to the local forestry supply chain."

Lohr thanked NOVEC for its leadership in renewable energy and energy reliability. "This is energy we have in abundance, and resources that, when managed sustainably, are constantly being replenished by younger trees sequestering more carbon. It's a win-win for our economy and our environment."

He added, "Biomass can provide reliable baseload power while ensuring the energy we produce remains carbon neutral. Unlike other forms of renewable energy, biomass can operate 24/7, providing a stable source of energy that compliments intermittent sources like wind and solar."

Barrett emphasized that the biomass process makes use of waste that would be left behind after logging. "We can harvest, chip and bring the waste to this plant, and do so sustainably."

Koehn said, "Having markets for renewable energy help to promote healthy and resilient forests, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve rural economies, and reduce wildfire risk."

Mike Davis, fuel procurement and plant operations manager, said, "Biomass energy production is unique in that it uses a local resource that produces local jobs and provides dispatchable energy to the local grid. National Bioenergy Day celebrates what is truly a community-based renewable energy source."



Fuel Procurement and Plant Operations Manager Mike Davis (right) leads elected officials and other guests on a plant tour to show them how wood waste becomes electricity.

EVENT SPEAKERS:



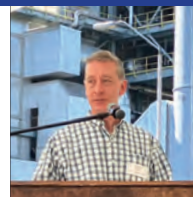
Matthew Lohr,
secretary
of Agriculture
and Forestry for
the Commonwealth
of Virginia



Steven Koehn,
director of
Cooperative
Forestry for the
U.S. Department
of Agriculture



David Schleicher,
NOVEC president
and CEO



Dr. Scott Barrett,
associate professor,
Department of
Forest Resources
and Environmental
Conservation,
Virginia Tech



Carrie Annand,
executive director
of the American
Biomass Energy
Association

At Blue Ridge Energy, an estimated 6,800 miles of the co-op's 8,500 miles of line were damaged, and the number of broken poles grew as workers conducted aerial assessments flying over impassable roads. "Many of our employees also lost power," said Renee Walker, director of public relations at Blue Ridge, in the days following Hurricane Helene. "Everyone, however, is working tirelessly and in good spirits — the cooperative spirit!"

Sarvis said that one unexpected "bonus" of working in the beautiful mountains of southwestern Virginia was crossing paths with a nest of copperheads. "There were about 13 of them!" He also gave a grateful shout-out to the teams of folks who took care of them during their 16-hour days. "They fed us, did our laundry, and made sure we had good places to stay. They deserve a huge thank you."

Fasenmyer agreed, remembering the kindness of the co-op customers. "One woman had meat on the smoker when we met her. She insisted on making us sandwiches ... And she had been without power for days. Everyone was so welcoming."

Bell, a first-class line technician, was away from home for about two weeks. "It was nice to work with lots of people from different places who had one goal," said Bell. "It takes a team to do the work and help as many people as we possibly could in a rough situation."



The NOVEC line crew worked hard to reconnect power lines and fix broken power poles.

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How did Anna start to enjoy life to the fullest?

At the age of 56, a back operation left me dependent on a cane, significantly impacting my daily life. Simple tasks like going to the store or meeting friends became challenging, and I even had to cancel a long-awaited anniversary trip to Italy.

My husband purchased a scooter for me, but it was cumbersome and uncomfortable for everyday use, leaving me feeling more constrained than liberated. However, everything changed when I came across the ATTO SPORT. This remarkable scooter proved to be a game changer. Not only is it robust and reliable, but it also conveniently splits into two pieces, allowing me to effortlessly lift it into my car trunk on my own. I was even able to stow it in the overhead compartment on the plane, enabling us to finally take that trip to Italy! I am now independent once more, able to go wherever I please and do so with a striking sense of style. In fact, I now find that my husband struggles to keep up with me!



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Keeping The Lights On

Reliable electricity is essential for our future

by Laura Emery, Staff Writer

Electricity powers every facet of life, including how we live, work, learn and play. Reliable electricity is needed for our homes, businesses, schools, farms and industries. It drives our economy, enables our communications, provides health and safety for our communities, and literally powers our lives down to the phone we hold in our hands. Reliable electricity isn't just important; it's critical — and essential for our future.

Today, the reliability of that electricity is more important than ever due to the growing demand for power. Heat pumps, smart devices, and even our cars are being increasingly electrified. The technology we now

depend on is consuming more and more electricity, like cloud storage, the internet and AI. But what is reliability? Reliability is the knowledge that when you flip the switch to turn on the lights, they'll come on — without fail.

Reliable power is vital to the health of our economies. Robust, reliable energy generation capabilities not only help retain business but also facilitate growth through expansion and the attraction of new business. A strong business environment benefits states and local communities, including increased tax revenue and job creation. Reliable power is foundational to realizing those benefits.

After many years of flat or declining

Electric cooperatives are continually evaluating new and emerging technologies.

electricity demand, we are experiencing rapidly increasing load forecasts while simultaneously experiencing significant retirements of fossil fuel-based generation over the last decade.

Existing generation resources — power plants — are being retired at a rate faster than new generation resources are being constructed. This directly impacts reliability, as many generation assets taken offline in recent years have been replaced with sources, including renewables, providing less baseload capacity. The North American Electric Reliability Corporation has warned power plant retirements without replacement generation will put our nation's grid reliability at risk.



As our lives become more electrified, electric cooperatives regularly seek out new ways to keep power sources reliable.



“There is very real potential for reliability to be at risk in the near-term,” says Chris Cosby, chief operating officer of Old Dominion Electric Cooperative.

At the Reliability Technical Conference held by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission on Oct. 16, PJM Interconnection LLC indicated that it projects a potential shortfall in generation supply by the end of this decade. “Across the PJM market, power supply itself has become synonymous with reliability. Having the appropriate generation resources to feed growing electricity demands is just as much of a concern to us as any other reliability issue there is,” says Casey Logan, president and CEO of Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative.

Electric cooperatives are continually evaluating new and emerging technologies during the transition to the “new energy

economy,” exploring the best methods to meet the growing power needs of our members, all while adhering to changing environmental and regulatory provisions.

Reliability is also addressed through focusing on day-to-day tasks. NOVEC President and CEO David Schleicher says, “On a day-to-day basis, our biggest reliability challenge is weather-related trees from outside the power line right-of-way. NOVEC has a 3.5-year trimming cycle, a danger tree removal program, and is now using satellite information to improve our identification of dead or dying trees as the foundation to providing our customers with first-quartile reliability.”

New technology meeting old challenges is also happening at Rappahannock Electric Cooperative. “Our aerial drone inspections now perform a full-overhead system review cycle for the distribution grid, and

we also use satellite imaging for vegetation management,” John Hewa, President and CEO of Rappahannock Electric Cooperative, adds.

As always, collective success in delivering reliability depends on a commitment to ongoing collaboration and support in order to keep pace with power demands and policy shifts. Today’s energy decisions made in Washington, D.C., Richmond and Annapolis will determine whether there are enough resources to meet tomorrow’s reliability demands. We need to work together to continue to “meet the moment” in a changing, challenging environment.

Cooperatives have exciting opportunities to remain on the forefront of the energy transition, but it’s imperative that reliability remain top of mind as we strategically navigate this transition and plan to power the homes, businesses and lifestyles of the future. ●



Reliability is now more important than ever, as new technologies consume more power.



A Pillar of the Community

Mount Zion Baptist Church celebrates 166 years

by Audrey Hingley, Contributing Writer

In a modern world where change is often inevitable, Mount Zion Baptist Church in Locust Grove, Va. — which recently celebrated 166 years as a congregation — may be somewhat of an anomaly.

But Mount Zion's long, storied history doesn't mean the church is stuck in the past. After all, it does have Wi-Fi.

"As we were approaching our 150th anniversary, I received a phone call from an Orange County official looking for churches who did not yet have access to the internet," recalls Pastor Sanford Reaves Jr., who is also a board member of Rappahannock Electric Cooperative. "I just happened to be in my church office the day the official called." Reaves says, at that point, many small rural churches like Mount Zion did not yet have internet access.

Reaves says getting that connectivity changed everything when the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020. The church put up a sign out front touting "free Wi-Fi." During the pandemic, families without internet access could sit in their cars in the church parking

PHOTOS BY EUGENE CAMPBELL



Pastor Sanford Reaves Jr.

lot and send resumes for new jobs, upload children's homework when online schools replaced in-classroom teaching for a while, and do the myriad of things that today all require an online connection.

"We were also able to stream our services on Facebook and communicate with [church members]," he explains.

A LONG HISTORY OF SERVICE

Mount Zion has remained an oasis for the area's residents, particularly

the African American community, by emphasizing family connections and a hometown atmosphere.

Before President Abraham Lincoln's 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, some local Black residents formed a "Prayer Band" in the home of Peter and Maria Armstead in an area off Indiantown Road near the present Mount Zion church in Locust Grove. Their earliest place of worship was known as a "brush arbor," a rough open-sided shelter built by vertical poles being driven into the ground, with additional long poles laid across the top to support a roof of brush, hay or cut branches. First appearing in the 1700s-1800s, brush arbors were used by some churches for worship or to accommodate lengthy revival meetings.

The church later erected a log cabin nearby and moved again in 1858, eventually becoming Mount Zion Baptist Church. Historically, there was dynamic growth in independent Black churches in Virginia between 1865 and 1900, as many freed slaves adjusted to a free life in post-Civil War America.



Left to right:
William Washington,
Pastor Sanford
Reaves Jr. and
Clayton Tyler.



Mount Zion has remained an oasis for the area's residents by emphasizing family connections and a hometown atmosphere.



The most recent church building was erected in 1954. The sanctuary was dedicated in 1963.

has served for 25 years), and is a past president of the local NAACP.

A 26-year member of REC, Reaves has also been an REC director for the past seven years. A graduate of Richmond's Smithdeal-Massey Business College, Reaves also graduated in 2005 from Virginia Union University's School of Divinity with a Master of Divinity degree.

"I had a calling," Reaves says of his later-in-life decision to become a minister and receive training at Virginia Union.

In 2006, after a trip to Ghana and his Virginia Union graduation, Reaves called Rev. Frank D. Lewis Sr., a moderator with the Wayland Blue Ridge Baptist Association and pastor at Antioch Baptist Church in Madison, Va., to offer his services as a "fill-in" pastor. Mount Zion Baptist needed someone to oversee two Sundays a month until they selected a new minister.

"My wife, Lorraine, and I were well-received here," Reaves recalls.

Two Sundays then turned into three and then four Sundays a month, and in 2007, Reaves was installed as a pastor, which he calls "God's plan."

William Washington, chairman of the church's deacon ministry, explains, "I saw the pastor when he was younger and he always had a mission — he always had something to do and somewhere to be. When he came here to preach, I knew in my heart he was called [here by God]. He was a good guy."

AN EYE TO THE FUTURE

Today, Reaves, Washington and Clayton Tyler, chairman of the church's trustees board, all see Mount Zion as a church with multi-generational appeal. Both Washington and Tyler note that their wives' families were originally Mount Zion members and both say they were drawn to the church through them.

"Some of the ancestors [who started the church] have family members who are still with us today," Reaves notes. "When you come to this rural church, it's usually filled up for a wedding or funeral — the church used to be the main gathering place for the community. One of my ancestors was a circuit rider who came here."

Reaves recalls that when he was growing up in nearby Culpeper, segregation was still in place. He also remembers "blue laws" prohibiting labor or commerce on Sunday.

In 1988, some store owners whose businesses were still prohibited from operating on Sundays sued the state of Virginia; in September of that year, the Supreme Court of Virginia ruled the law unconstitutional, ending almost 400 years of Virginia blue laws. Today, churches find themselves "competing" with Sunday sports team events and other Sunday activities that were never a factor during the blue law era.

Pastor Reaves emphasizes that no one is ever turned away at Mount Zion. "We have been treated so well here, and we treat everybody the same — all are welcome here," he says. ●

In 1894, Black Baptists formed the National Baptist Convention, today the largest Black religious organization in America.

CONTINUING TO SERVE

Mount Zion's latest church building was erected in 1954, and the church sanctuary was dedicated in 1963. In recent years, many improvements have been made to the structure, including converting the church's oil heating system to a new electric heat pump, replacing a side entrance deck and a handicapped ramp, and replacing the entire sanctuary floor. The church building also added a fellowship hall, a multi-purpose area and an office for Reaves.

In 2005, Reaves became the congregation's 11th pastor. As an area realtor, he owns Sanford and Sons Construction and Janitorial Services, is chairman of the Culpeper County Planning Commission (where he



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GAME DAY Taco Dip

recipe courtesy of Family Features

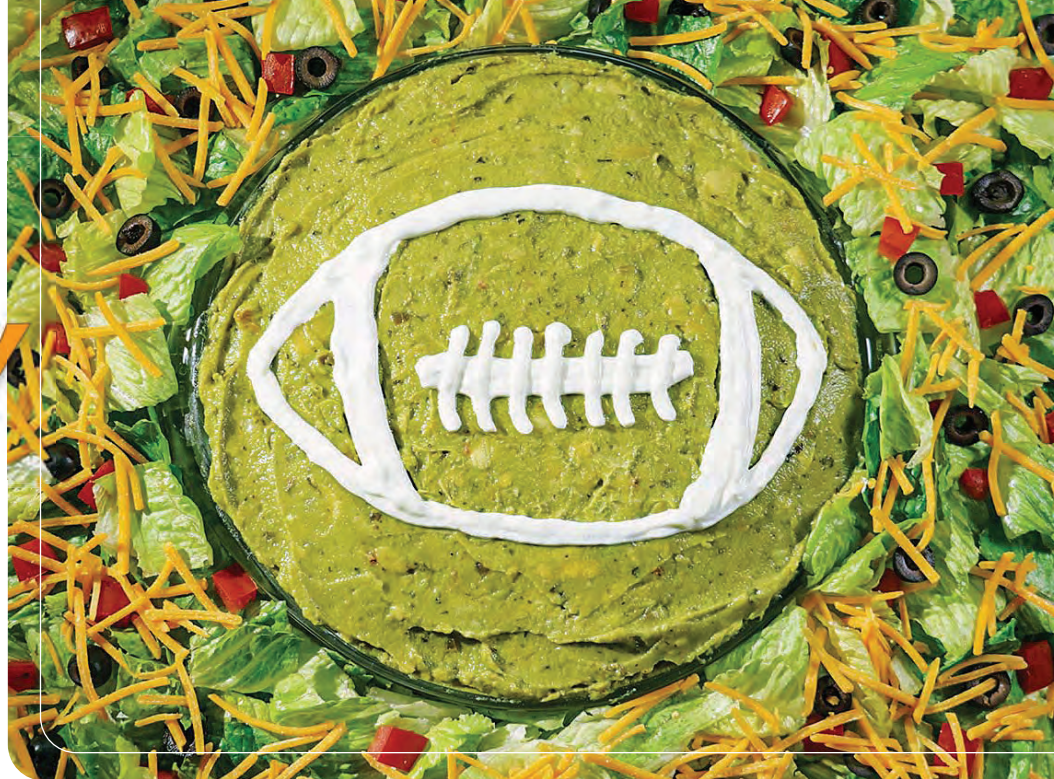
Ingredients:

- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 pkg. (1 oz.) taco seasoning
- ¼ cup water
- 2 tablespoons minced cilantro
- 1 can (16 oz.) refried beans, zesty salsa flavor
- 1 jar (16 oz.) thick and chunky salsa, medium or hot
- 2 cups guacamole

- ½ cup sour cream
- 3 pkgs. (5 oz. each) Fresh Express Butter Supreme
- 1 ½ cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1 cup tomatoes, chopped
- 1 can (2 ¼ oz.) sliced black olives, drained
- 1 pkg. (14 oz.) tortilla chips

Directions:

In skillet over medium-high heat, cook beef 5 minutes, or until no longer pink. Sprinkle with taco seasoning; mix well. Add water; cook 2 minutes, or until water is absorbed. Transfer to bowl; cool to room temperature. Add cilantro; mix well. In 9-inch pie plate, evenly spread refried beans; top with seasoned ground beef and salsa. Add spoonfuls of guacamole across top of salsa then carefully spread to smooth. Place sour cream in small resealable bag; cut off corner. Pipe sour cream to create a football shape on guacamole. Put pie plate in center of 15-by-18-inch tray. Arrange salad blend around pie plate. Top with cheddar cheese, tomatoes and olives. Serve with tortilla chips.



GAME DAY Buffalo Chicken Dip

recipe courtesy of Family Features

Ingredients:

- 2 cups chicken, shredded
- 8 oz. cream cheese
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1 ½ cups sharp cheddar cheese, plus additional for topping, divided
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 heavy pinch dried dill
- ½ cup hot sauce
- blue cheese crumbles
- 2 green onions, chopped
- chips
- vegetable sticks

Directions:

Heat oven to 400 degrees. In bowl, mix shredded chicken, cream cheese, sour cream, 1 1/2 cups shredded cheese, onion powder, garlic powder and dried dill until combined. Add hot sauce; mix until combined. Transfer mixture from bowl to oven-safe dish. Top with additional shredded cheese, to taste. Bake until cheese is melted, approximately 15 minutes. Top with blue cheese crumbles and chopped green onion. Serve warm with chips and vegetable sticks. Serves 3-4.



GAME DAY Chicken Wings

recipe courtesy of Family Features

Ingredients:

- ½ cup butter, cubed
- ⅓ cup flour
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 10 chicken wingettes, thawed
- dipping sauces (optional)
- fresh parsley (optional)
- or nutmeg

Directions:

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Line baking sheet with foil. Arrange butter cubes on foil. In medium bowl, combine flour, paprika, garlic powder, salt and pepper. Coat both sides of wings in flour mixture then evenly space among butter cubes on baking sheet. Bake wings for 30 minutes. Turn wings over and bake 15 minutes, or until crispy and fully cooked. Serve with dipping sauces and sprinkle with fresh parsley, if desired. Serves 4.



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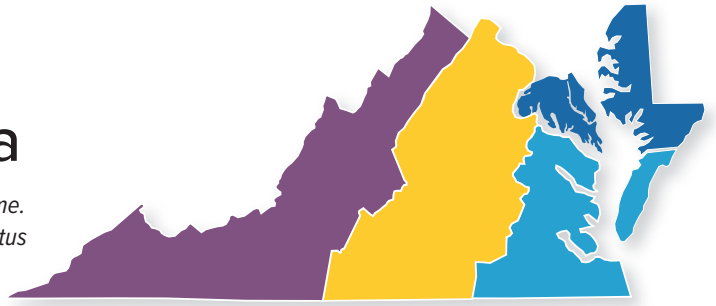
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BLUE RIDGE WEST

MARCH

8-9 HIGHLAND CO. Highland County Maple Festival. Highlandcounty.org.

PIEDMONT

JANUARY

5 HUDDLESTON. Lecture Series: The Dam – History, Mechanics and the Watershed. Discovery Center. 3-4 p.m. 540-297-6066. Smlspfriends.com.

18 LOUISA. 2025 Garden Expo with Seed Share. Louisa Co. Middle School. 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Louisacvmg.org.

FEBRUARY

2 HUDDLESTON. Lecture Series: Nuisance Wildlife in your Backyard and Managing Wildlife Conflicts. Discovery Center. 3-4 p.m. 540-297-6066. Smlspfriends.com.

8 WARRENTON. Trout Unlimited Flyfishing Show. Highland School. 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Rapidantu.org.

MARCH

2 HUDDLESTON. Lecture Series: The Women of Poplar Forest. Discovery Center. 3-4 p.m. 540-297-6066. Smlspfriends.com.

7, 14 MINERAL. Fish Fry. St. Jude Catholic Church. 4:30 p.m.-7 p.m. Louisacatholics.org.

MARYLAND

FEBRUARY

8 PRESTON. Toy & Train Show. Preston Volunteer Fire Co. 9 a.m.-2 p.m. 410-673-7538.

PRINT DEADLINES: Feb. 1 for March 15-April 15
March 1 for April 15-May 15

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Virginia Legislative Map

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January Can Be Fun ... Or Not

Navigating the winter doldrums

by Margo Oxendine, Contributing Columnist



All the holiday hoopla is over, and we are now facing January. Is there a more drab, gray month? I don't think so.

Yet, winter does have its attributes. There's snow, first of all. I love snow, as you know, so I am always excited about the possibility of snow in January. I don't usually have to drive anywhere in the snow, which makes me very happy. I am lucky to work at home, with a furnace and a cozy gas fireplace. Provided the heat has not gone out. If it has, there's always another sweater and a lap robe.

I am lucky enough to have a carport, so my car rarely has to be cleaned off, should I find it necessary to get out on the slippery roads. Considering my "luck" (all of it bad) with cars this past year, I will go out of my way to stay home.

When I must drive, one thing bugs me like no other: inconsiderate people who do not clean off the tops of their vehicles. That means that, more often than not, a gust of wind will blow that

snow and ice back onto my car and the windshield. So please clean off the tops of your vehicles!

I try not to put off my daily walk when it snows. In fact, there are some wonderful things about it, besides the fact that my snow boots are too cumbersome for walking. What I love is to look at the wildlife tracks in the snow. Raccoons, foxes, dogs, bobcats, deer, and even once, a rare bear track, even though that bear was supposed to be snoozing.

But I must choose my steps very carefully. Some have ice underneath, and I go skidding. I have fallen more than once but have always — so far — been able to haul myself back up. I fear falling and then wallowing in a frozen mound until the rare car comes down the lane.

I always try to buy more groceries than I need during winter. I don't know when or if I'll get back out, and heaven forbid I run out of, say, half-and-half, or chicken salad, or Lindy's ices. We don't have anything like Door Dash out here in the rural hinterlands.

One wintry night after a particularly

blizzard-like snow, my mother and I piled into my sister's small four-wheel drive truck and headed to Covington for groceries and Chinese food. Did I mention the truck was small? Well, when it came time to get back inside for the trip home, I couldn't make it. We had to enlist the help of a perplexed stranger to push me into the truck before we could get on our way. It was a tight ride.

Another time, when I finally had my own 4WD (that I didn't yet know how to operate), a friend and I headed to Covington for groceries. It was 10 degrees below zero. Yet, out trudges my friend to the car lugging a cooler! He seemed offended when I ribbed him about it. Apparently, he has an innate fear of spoiled food. But I honestly don't think there was any danger that day.

At least I no longer have to shovel out my driveway. The one day I slipped while shoveling, knocked myself out, and lay there in a frozen heap, unconscious, was enough for me. Thank heavens someone noticed "a pile of something in Margo's driveway" and called the rescue squad. When I came to and saw the surrounding rescuers hefting me onto the gurney, my first thought was, "Oh geez, now they're going to guess how much I weigh!" ●

To order a copy of Margo's "A Party of One," call 540-468-2147 Mon.-Wed., 9 a.m.-5 p.m., or email therecorderoffice@gmail.com.



PHOTO BY ROBIN MERCHANT, SEC MEMBER



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Why Be Evergreen?

Advantages and disadvantages of trees losing leaves in winter

by Steve Carroll, Contributing Columnist

As I write this column, most of our trees have dropped their leaves and will remain leaf-free until spring. Most trees, though not all. Obvious exceptions are conifers, such as pines and hemlocks, which are green year-round.

Why do some plants (deciduous species) lose all their leaves each year, while others are evergreen? Not surprisingly, there are advantages and disadvantages to each strategy.

The most obvious advantage of being evergreen is that these plants — though they do shed a portion of their leaves each year — needn't replace their entire leaf canopy every spring. This represents a significant energy savings, energy that can instead be used for growth, reproduction, and defense against herbivores and pathogens.

Staying green also means that when temperatures are sufficiently warm and soils are not frozen, these plants can use sunlight's energy to photosynthesize (combine carbon dioxide and water to produce sugars and oxygen). It has been argued that the conical shape of many conifers not only helps shed winter snow, but also increases their capture of the low-angle sunlight characteristic of winter, especially at high latitudes.

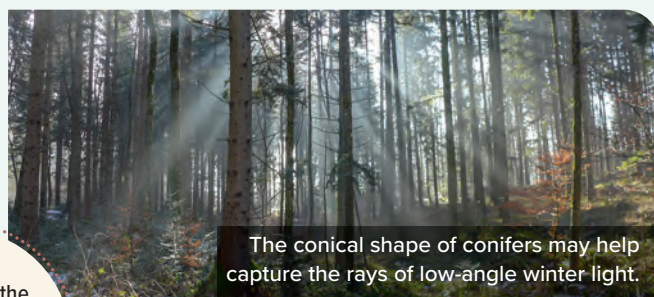
We should not be surprised that being evergreen also has disadvantages, for, as Kermit the Frog crooned, "It's not easy being green." For example, maintaining leaves year-round requires protecting the tissue from low temperatures (especially farther north) and the drying effects of winter winds.

Given the environmental challenges of winter, how do evergreens survive, and even photosynthesize? Much of this ability is due to their leaves. Whether pointed and needle-like, as in pines and spruces, or scale-like, as in juniper and Eastern white cedar, conifer leaves provide better protection from desiccation than do the relatively thin, flat leaves of most deciduous trees.

Conifer needles have a thick, waxy layer over their epidermis, which decreases water loss. They also have a low surface-area to internal-tissue ratio. Plants take up carbon dioxide and lose water through pores called stomates, which are typically sunken or embedded in the leaf epidermis.

Conifers are the dominant trees in many nutrient-poor environments, including the far north and high elevations, bogs, poorly drained habitats, and sandy soils. Given this

Conifers are the dominant trees in many nutrient-poor environments.



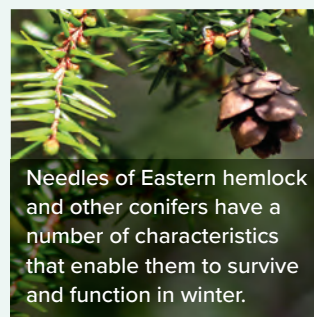
The conical shape of conifers may help capture the rays of low-angle winter light.

PHOTO COURTESY CHATTAHOOCHEE-OCONEE NATIONAL FOREST VIA FLICKR



Many conifers have thick bark to protect them from fire, insects and other challenges.

PHOTO COURTESY JUSTIN MEISSEN VIA FLICKR



Needles of Eastern hemlock and other conifers have a number of characteristics that enable them to survive and function in winter.

PHOTO COURTESY JACK PEARCE VIA FLICKR



Controlled burns are frequently used to maintain habitat of fire-adapted species.

PHOTO COURTESY AARON YEAH VIA FLICKR

wide range of habitats, conifers should not be expected to have identical characteristics. For example, the seed cones of jack pine and loblolly pine are serotinous; they open in response to fire and release seeds after the fire has eliminated or weakened the competition, creating a suitable, mineral seed bed. Similarly, longleaf pine in the Southeast U.S. has evolved a set of characteristics that allows it to thrive in fire-prone environments.

As always, there are exceptions to the patterns described above. For example, deciduous conifers, such as bald cypress and larch, and evergreen flowering plants, such as holly and southern magnolia. But that's a discussion for another day.

Evergreens' defining characteristic — staying, well, evergreen — provides many benefits when planted in our yards and gardens: year-round visual interest, cover for wildlife, privacy, a windbreak, and a means of hiding your neighbor's ugly shed and clutter. Perhaps there is an evergreen just right for your property. ●

Steve Carroll is a botanist and ecologist who speaks and writes about trees, gardening and the world of plants. He is the co-author of "Ecology for Gardeners," published by Timber Press.

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USO STRONG

Supporting the military's weather relief efforts

story courtesy of StatePoint

As local communities throughout the southeast region of the U.S. coped with the damage caused by recent hurricanes, National Guard, Coast Guard and additional active-duty service members rescued people and pets, cleared roads and distributed needed supplies. These service members not only left their loved ones behind to tackle stressful disaster response missions, but many were also members of impacted communities, making their response efforts all the more challenging.

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Acting as "USO Centers on wheels," Mobile USO vehicles and their teams provide service members with a moment of respite after long days of challenging work. In addition to offering classic USO amenities like Wi-Fi and device charging stations, Mobile USO vehicles are also stocked with hygiene kits, snacks, water and sports drinks to keep service members properly fueled and hydrated so they can stay sharp during their missions.

When electricity, water and cell service is extremely limited — or

non-existent — in the wake of a hurricane, having a space where responding service members can access air conditioning, a cold glass of water or a hot meal, Wi-Fi and a charging port to reach out to their loved ones is crucial to boosting morale. That's why Mobile USO vehicles access multiple locations over a short period, often driving right into areas most affected by the storms, so they can meet the service members where they are.

During challenging military missions,

including disaster response in American communities, small moments of respite can make all the difference in service members' operational readiness and well-being as they prepare to head out on another mission.

The generosity of donors and partners allows the USO to deploy resources just as service members receive their orders. ●

▶ *To support the men and women serving in the U.S. military and their families through the USO, visit uso.org.*



United Service Organizations, better known as the USO, is often at the forefront of natural disasters, offering relief to local communities.

PHOTO COURTESY UNITED SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

USO FACTOID: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Just prior to the onset of America's involvement in World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought to unite several service associations into one organization to lift the morale of the U.S. military and nourish support for it on the home front. Those entities — the Salvation Army, Young Men's Christian Association, Young Women's Christian Association, National Catholic Community Services, National Travelers Aid Association and the National Jewish Welfare Board — became the United Service Organizations or the USO. The six stars in the USO logo represent these organizations.



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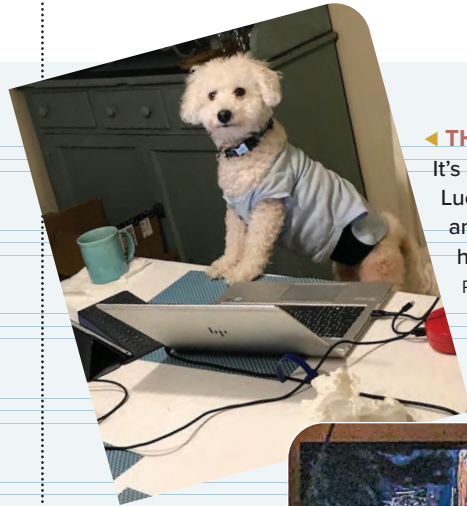
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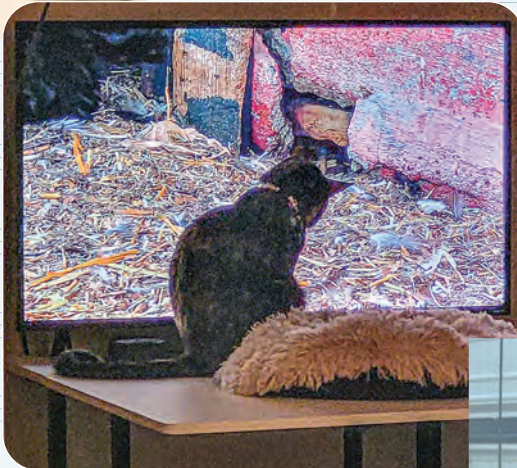
THIS BYTES

It's a dog-eat-dog world. Luc knows he's the underdog and has to work hard so his human can have nice things. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY BRENDA GARTON



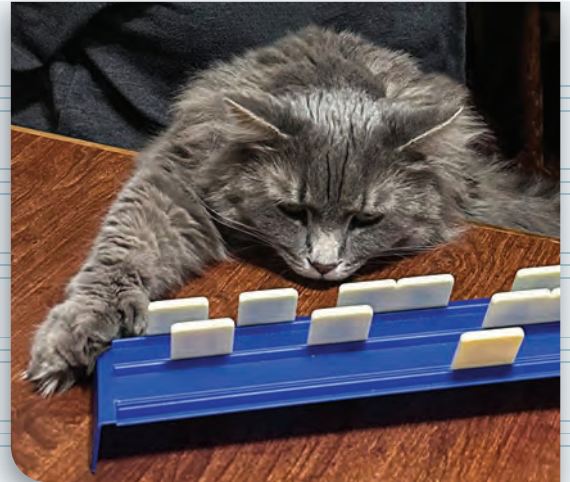
CLOSE CAT-IONING

Frankie gets up close and personal during a scene on Cat TV. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY MELISSA RICE



FELINE LUCKY

Jumpy is a great Rummy Cube partner. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY CHRISTI MEEK



RUFF DAY

Stella Mae is ready for the weekend. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY KATHY COMER



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A Fur-ari would better fulfill Lucky's "knead" for speed, but this will do. PHOTO SUBMITTED BY EILEEN MALONE



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