

CO-OP CONNECTIONS



Virginia
Cooperative Council

Quarterly newsletter of the Virginia Cooperative Council

Spring 2019

Annual meeting recap: Co-op leaders recharge batteries

"The cooperative business model is the best business model on earth!" asserted Adam Schwartz, a consultant for cooperatives and an adjunct professor at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Va. Speaking to more than 50 cooperative leaders at the Virginia Cooperative Council's annual meeting on March 6, he not only asked that they renew their commitment to the seven principles of cooperative living, but also charged them to recruit, train and mentor young people to share that passion.

"It's imperative that we teach the next generation about co-ops, and then make room in our organizations to give them positions of authority," Schwartz said. "What I have seen, especially among more mature cooperatives that have been around 75 to 80 years, is that the age of the board members and of senior management tends to be towards the higher end. If we really want our organizations to have a legacy and to go forward, we need to be working to bring young people into more positions."

Rural cooperatives have even more of an obligation to reach out to younger people, he added.

"If you're having problems with brain drain and young people leaving the community, one of the ways to get these people to stay in your area is to give them roots," Schwartz explained. "When they have positions of authority like being on the board or senior management, it makes them more likely to stay in their community."

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"If we really want our organizations to have a legacy and to go forward, we need to be working to bring young people into more positions."

*- Adam Schwartz,
founder of
The Cooperative Way*

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Adam Schwartz, founder of The Cooperative Way, gave an inspirational address to VCC Annual Meeting attendees on March 6 at the Frontier Culture Museum in Staunton.



Outgoing VCC President J.T. Anderson of Farm Credit of the Virginias presents Adam Schwartz with a gift basket donated by Graves Mountain Lodge.

Council & Foundation finance update

The Virginia Cooperative Council ended 2018 with total expenses of \$61,880.63 and \$5,190 in expense over revenue. This was primarily due to board-approved costs associated with developing the council's new website, www.virginia.coop, that uses a Wordpress platform.

The Virginia Foundation for Cooperation ended 2018 with \$23,951.40 in expenses and assets totaling \$581,574.79. Legal notice was published in the Feb. 24, 2019 edition of the *Richmond Times Dispatch*.

Annual meeting recap, continued

Adam Shiflett and state FFA officer Kendall Knicely gave an overview of last year's Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education and National Institute of Cooperative Education. VCC staff and members are actively working to recruit high school youth for the March 29-31, 2019 VICE, with registration forms posted online at www.virginia.coop

At the meeting VCC members bid a fond farewell to Allen Melton, the Council's retiring executive secretary, and welcomed Mary Howell, who started Jan. 2. With outgoing President J.T. Anderson and Eric Paulson stepping down at the end of three terms each, the board approved Richard Sladic of Culpeper Farmer's Cooperative to fill Jim Hunsberger's unexpired term, while VCC members elected Katie Frazier of Farm Credit of the Virginias to serve a three-year term as Director at Large. The board elected Richard Johnstone, CEO of the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives, as board president for 2019-2020 and Brad Brown of Augusta Cooperative as vice president. Jessica Harris was re-elected to serve as recording secretary and Tess Seibel succeeds Chandler Vaughan as FFA Advisor.

Before attendees enjoyed fellowship over a buffet lunch catered by Mrs. Rowe's, Dr. Kim Morgan with the Virginia Tech Department of Agriculture and Applied Economics provided an update on the continued success of VCC scholarship recipients. On average, six students in the program receive \$2,000 scholarships from the Va. Foundation for Cooperation, and are heavily involved in hands-on research to aid cooperative members in the state, she said.

From left, VCC board members include Dr. Kim Morgan, Allen Taylor, Adam Shiflett, Brad Brown (vice president), Jessica Harris (secretary), Eric Paulson (past vice president), Laura Jackson, Richard Sladic, Mary Howell, Brian Wolfe, Katie Frazier, Jim Belfield, Jessica Harris (secretary), Katie Frazier, Jim Belfield, Richard Johnstone (president) and J.T. Anderson (past president). Not pictured: David Lipscomb, Jimmy Graves, FFA Advisor Tess Seibel and Virginia Dept. of Education Advisor LaVeta Nutter.





VICE participants: Where are they now?

This column profiles past attendees of the Virginia Institute for Cooperative Education (VICE), sharing how their current career and activities involve Virginia cooperatives. Please contact VCC if you'd like to suggest a VICE graduate to feature in an upcoming issue.

Laura Emery

"I currently work as Field Editor and Social Media Coordinator for *Cooperative Living* magazine, Virginia's largest statewide magazine, published 10 times a year by the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives

I also write magazine articles for our member cooperatives, do photography and create videos, and develop and schedule content for our social media platforms.

When I started at the Association 19 years ago, it wasn't my first introduction to the world of cooperatives. When I was in high school, a woman recommended I attend VICE. I'll never forget what she told me, "The cooperative world is like a big family and once you're in it, they'll take good care of you." And, 21 years later, I can say that this is absolutely true!

My mother insisted that VICE was a great opportunity, but I had no way of knowing it would be a career game-changer for me. I had a great time, learned so much, and I met many wonderful individuals with whom I've stayed in touch (including Jeff Heatwole, whose father has served on Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative's board of directors for 28 years).

I also served as a Virginia Delegate at the National Institute of Cooperative Education (NICE) in St. Louis, Missouri, that year and, while at NICE, I wrote an essay about cooperatives and won first place. Winning the essay contest pushed me further into the "cooperative world," as I was a guest speaker at one of the Virginia Council of Farmer Cooperatives' annual meetings in Syria, as well as at a Cooperative Month Breakfast in Richmond. When I answered the job ad for my current position, I had no idea it was connected to the "cooperative world." Until I showed up, that is, and someone said to me, "We already know who you are. We heard you speak at the Cooperative Month Breakfast." Thanks to the wonderful opportunities afforded me by attending both VICE and NICE, I am now fully immersed in the "cooperative world" -- and incredibly grateful to be a part of the Cooperative Family!

Executive Secretary's Message: Let's Boost Individual Memberships!

I learned about the Virginia Cooperative Council in 2013, while attending their annual meeting with my co-workers from the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives. Since then, I've attended many VCC events and am excited about taking over the reins from Allen Melton. I'll be attending my first Virginia Institute for Cooperative Education this spring and look forward to helping continue VCC's mission, promoting the power of cooperatives to new generations.

Much of my career experience includes membership development, as well as planning educational events, so I'm working to bring more cooperative businesses and co-op supporters into the Council, as well as increase the Council's social media presence. We need to make more Virginia students aware of the tremendous opportunities provided by the Council and its Foundation!

I'd also like to make more of our members aware of the individual VCC membership category. For \$25 a year, this is the perfect way for those retiring from their co-op careers to stay in touch with co-op friends and support the work of the Council. If you may know someone who qualifies, please encourage them to follow up!

- Mary Howell



VCC Supports Young Farmers

Congratulations to **Richard Clemmer**, who accepted the 2019 Outstanding Agribusiness Person Award from Young Farmers of Virginia. Rich and his wife Becky operate Beck-n-Rich Farm in Rockbridge County. VCC sponsored the award, which Mary Howell, the Council's executive secretary, presented Feb. 2 at the Young Farmers Convention in Williamsburg.

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Virginia Cooperative Council

P.O. Box 25202
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Welcome to our newest VCC members!

Fredericksburg Food Cooperative

www.fredericksburgfoodcoop.com

Congratulations to Fredericksburg Food Cooperative on receiving the "Best of the Best" award at the Up & Coming Startup Food Conference, held in Milwaukee earlier this year.

Roanoke Cooperative Association, LTD (Roanoke Natural Foods)

www.roanoke.coop

Virginia Foundation for Agriculture, Innovation & Sustainability

www.vafairs.com

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