

# CO-OP CONNECTIONS



Virginia  
Cooperative Council

Quarterly newsletter of the Virginia Cooperative Council - "Achieving together what one cannot do alone"

Fall 2019



Attendees at the Georgia Institute on Cooperative Leadership (from left): VCC Executive Secretary Mary Howell, Joseph Azenon, Ruth Fitzgerald, Lauren Gibson (at top), Ellie Holter, Paige Baker, Jacob Craun and Adam Shiflett. More than 50 students from three states took part in this five-day event at the FFA/FCCLA Camp in Covington, GA.

## What a 'NICE' experience!

### Making new friends while growing co-op spirit

Six top participants from this year's Virginia Institute for Cooperative Education (VICE) - Jonathan Azenon, Paige Baker, Jacob Craun, Ruth Fitzgerald, Ellie Holter and Lauren Gibson—traveled to Covington, GA July 14-19 for a co-op leadership institute sponsored by the Georgia Cooperative Council. In addition to the Virginians, more than 50 students sponsored by co-ops across Georgia and Tennessee participated in the week-long camp, held at Georgia's FFA/FCCLA Camp an hour east of Atlanta.

"This event doubled as our National Institute of Cooperative Education (NICE)," explained Adam Shiflett with Farm Credit of the Virginias, who served as a chaperone along with Council Executive Secretary Mary Howell.

The action-packed agenda included interactive classroom sessions, field trips to an electric cooperative and dairy farm member of a multistate marketing cooperative, and team-building outdoor activities. Virginia students excelled, with Jonathan Azenon and Lauren Gibson serving in leadership roles for a co-op marketing exercise, "print vs. digital," and Jacob Craun's team winning the pig design competition.

"We learned lots more about cooperatives and made great new friends," said Ellie Holter of Buchanan. Visit [public.fotki.com/mkhowell](http://public.fotki.com/mkhowell) to enjoy all the week's photos.

## In This Issue

- Silent Auction donations needed by Oct. 3
- Foundation for Cooperation updates investment policy
- VICE graduates: where are they now?
- Executive Secretary's message
- Co-ops in the news
- Welcome to our newest members!

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# Donations sought for Oct. 3 Co-op Month breakfast

What better way to celebrate Co-op Month in Virginia than by gathering with staff and leaders from sister co-ops? On Thursday, Oct. 3, long-time VCC supporter Bette Brand will share insights from her current role as Administrator for the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's Rural Business- Cooperative Service. The Council's Co-op Month event is again being held at The Place in Glen Allen and will feature a hearty breakfast buffet, with RSVPs requested by **Wednesday, Sept. 25** (registration is \$25 per member, payable by check or Paypal.)

Brand, a longtime Virginia cooperative business leader and past VCC board member, will share her vision for rural development needs across the nation, discussing challenges and opportunities facing rural America and the key role that cooperative businesses must play. The Co-op Month event will also honor the latest recipients of the Council's Cooperative Leadership Awards.

Attendees are encouraged to donate items and participate in a silent auction to benefit students enrolled in next year's Virginia Institute of Cooperative Education, scheduled for March 27-29, 2020 at Graves Mountain Lodge. Please contact VCC Executive Secretary Mary Howell with details on your auction item(s); donors may drop items off that morning. See you there!



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## Va. Foundation of Cooperation updates investment policy

Since 2011, the Virginia Foundation of Cooperation, Inc. (VFC) has followed an investment policy that required 100 percent use of U.S. Treasury securities and top-rated corporate bonds to ensure a consistent rate of return on funds donated by Claude Scroggs and Luther Raper. The Foundation provides annual scholarships to top graduates of the Virginia Institute of Cooperative Education (VICE), as well as students in Virginia Tech's Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics.

"Our goal has been for investment yields to cover annual scholarships and annual fees that include fund administration by Morgan Stanley Wealth Management and tax preparation and reporting costs," explained VFC board President Richard Johnstone.

Johnstone noted that recent changes in the investment climate, including expectation that the U.S. Treasury will raise interest rates, led the VFC board to direct Mark Falls, First Vice President at Morgan Stanley's Richmond office, to prepare a revised policy that would include top-grade stocks as well as bonds. Falls, who has managed the VFC accounts since 1992, made a compelling presentation at VFC's June 20 board meeting. He provided visuals showing the potential for more sustained growth by using a blended portfolio. Following discussion, the VFC board voted unanimously to approve the proposed policy update. The new policy allows up to 30 percent of VFC investments to be placed in large capitalization equities (such as "blue chip" stocks). Falls will gradually transition investments to follow this change and provide annual reports to the VFC board.

"We are confident the policy update will ensure VFC meets or exceeds its annual rate of return goal and preserve our ability to provide scholarships for years to come," Johnstone concluded.

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## Members in the news

**Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative CEO John C. Lee, Jr.** has been named board president of the National Cooperative Services Corporation (NCSC), while **Rappahannock Electric Cooperative CEO Kent Farmer** has been named board president of the Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC). Neither of these cooperative finance institutions has previously had a board president from the Delmarva region, and John and Kent are the first cooperative leaders from the same state to serve as board leaders at the same time. Congrats to both!



Dr. Julien Cadot.

**Dr. Julien Cadot** recently joined the faculty of Virginia Tech's Dept. of Agricultural and Applied Economics as the first James and Renae Pearson Collegiate Faculty Fellow, a position endowed by these two alumni to bring expertise from industry and academia into the classroom and provide students with greater experiential learning opportunities. His research background includes a focus on cooperatives, corporate governance and bank relationships, with a specific expertise on the wine industry. Cadot plans to teach an **undergraduate course on the cooperative business model** next year, which will be Tech's first class on co-ops in several years. He plans to use case studies and project-based experiences as well as guest speakers. Before joining the department, Cadot previously served as associate professor and head of the finance and economics department at the Institut Supérieur de Gestion in Paris, France. Dr. Cadot earned both his bachelor's in agricultural science and master's in agricultural science from Montpellier Sup' Agro and his doctorate from Montpellier University in France.

**Want to share news from your co-op? Email [mary.howell@sscoop.com](mailto:mary.howell@sscoop.com) or message the Council on Facebook.**



# VICE participants: Where are they now?

*This column profiles past attendees of the Virginia Institute of Cooperative Education. Please contact VCC with suggested VICE graduates to feature in an upcoming issue!*

## Natasha Skelton

### **What did participating in VICE mean to you? What is a favorite memory?**

I have so many memories from attending VICE and NICE in 1999 and 2000, and was lucky enough to attend both events twice, first as a participant, and then as a student leader. I'll never forget the skit that our student leaders created and performed at my second NICE in Nashville, TN explaining the seven cooperative principles, delivered as an episode of "The Crocodile Hunter." It was hilarious— and memorable!

### **Please share how participating in VICE and NICE influenced your career.**

Currently, I am Virginia Field Representative for the Conservation Fund. For over 30 years, the Fund has been saving special places across America. Our work is predicated on partnerships and we have worked with government, businesses and colleague organizations in all 50 states since 1985. Together, we have protected nearly 70,000 acres in Virginia and over eight million acres across the country while producing economic, environmental and social benefits.

For me, the cooperative principles of "concern for community" and "education, training and information" set a high bar for all businesses to reach for. I'm a proud member and patron of several cooperatives in my community for this very reason. Because Virginia cooperatives were so concerned about my community and invested in my education, I gained early insight into business and leadership that played a defining role in my career. I continue to use these skills each day in my work and smile each time I encounter a young person that has also benefited from the investment the cooperative community has made in their growth and development. It shows!



**Natasha Skelton, 1999 and 2000 VICE  
(and NICE!) participant.**

## Executive Secretary's Message: Co-op Spirit Reigns at NICE

I missed going to summer camp as a kid, so had extra reason to anticipate taking six of our top VICE participants to the Georgia Cooperative Council's (GCC) Cooperative Leadership Institute at their FFA/FCCLA camp. Loading our rental van with snacks, water and Gatorade, I picked up Paige in Ashland early that Sunday. Jacob, Jonathan, Ruth, and fellow-chaperone Adam Shiflett were waiting in Staunton, but Lauren got her dates mixed up and was still in Northern Virginia. After consulting with her parents, we agreed to pick her up at the Atlanta airport that evening and she caught a flight. Our van was still getting full, so Adam removed a rear seat to make room when we picked up Ellie in Buchanan. We had time to quickly tour downtown Atlanta before Lauren's flight arrived. Reaching the FFA Camp by 10 p.m., we got some much-needed rest. The next day, we joined dozens of youngsters from other camp programs heading to breakfast, then spent the morning climbing Stone Mountain and enjoying the views. GCC's institute started that afternoon with Adam Schwartz' interactive introduction to co-ops and engaging icebreaker events. Adam Shiflett joined several other speakers who explained the types of cooperatives and how they operate. Participants were divided into two teams tasked with developing a marketing campaign to promote the camp to future attendees, with one focusing on print media and the other on digital platforms that would be presented on the final morning.

Tuesday was spent touring electric co-op Walton EMC, which included safety demonstrations by linemen, and Williams Dairy, part of a milk marketing cooperative based in Virginia. Temperatures cooled in time for Wednesday's outdoor team-building

exercises, which included a ropes course, mud run, jumping from a tower onto an inflated raft, "the Blob," and finally a slip & slide. On Thursday, students divided into six teams challenged to build pigs from sections of PVC pipe and connectors. Each group explained the logic behind their design, and Jacob led the team that took top honors! The evening ended with a pool party and pizza. I was so proud of our students' contribution to the marketing plans presented Friday morning. Our last stop before leaving Georgia was Jaemor Farms, where we bought peaches and other delicious farm products. Tired but happy, I dropped our last student off late Friday evening. Memories of the week are captured at [public.fotki.com/mkhowell](http://public.fotki.com/mkhowell), and we're already looking forward to returning to Georgia next year!

- Mary Howell



**Lauren Gibson (standing) leads a team exercise in Georgia.**

# Six earn Scroggs-Raper Scholarships

Congratulations to these six students in Virginia Tech's Dept. Agriculture and Applied Economics who received \$2,000 Scholarships from the Va. Foundation of Cooperation, Inc. for 2019-2020:

**Chris Kuhler**, a sophomore & FFA member who recently attended VICE;

**Eli Mefford**, a senior & teacher's assistant for Dr. Ellerbrock considering a teaching career;

**Grayson Lambert**, a senior who plans to work as an agronomist or precision agriculturalist;

**Hunter Sanderson**, a junior on the Dean's list who has worked on his father's poultry farm since age 12; and

**Garrett Shumate**, a junior who will use his ag business degree on his family's beef farm.

**Ethan Wagoner**, who plans to continue working at his family's Christmas tree farm and become an entrepreneur with his own nursery business.

"Past VFC president J.T. Anderson will represent the Foundation when we recognize these students on Oct. 2 at Virginia Tech's scholarship banquet," said VFC board President Richard Johnstone. Applications for 2020 Scroggs-Raper Scholarships will be posted on the VFC website and are due **March 1, 2020**.

Welcome to our newest VCC members!  
**Adam Schwartz**, **The Cooperative Way**

**Natasha Skelton**, **The Conservation Fund**

**Individual memberships are \$25/year and are open to all those not currently employed by a member cooperative and who wish to support the Council.**

Updating your will? Please consider the Virginia Foundation for Cooperation, Inc. We welcome tax-deductible contributions that will be used to support educational and scholarship programs.

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