

# CO-OP CONNECTIONS



Virginia  
Cooperative Council

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

Spring 2021



2021 VICE scholarship winners, clockwise from top left: Makenna Garrett, Tanner Wise, Hayley Daubert and Sammy Leach. Not pictured: Eleni Kasianides. Each student submitted a project on the Virginia co-op of their choice, and has been invited to attend Georgia Cooperative Council's Youth Leadership Conference from July 19-23.

## Council awards \$5,000 in VICE scholarships

This year's Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education (VICE) was again held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each applicant completed an online test based on the "Welcome to Cooperatives" manual and videos about cooperatives and submitted a project about the cooperative of their choice. This project could take the form of a video, slideshow or essay.

After VICE Committee members reviewed each submission, the Council awarded scholarships to five high school students as follows:

**Hayley Daubert** of Dayton, VA—\$1,500 (Rockingham Cooperative)

**Sammy Leach** of Midland, VA —\$1,500 (CFC Farm & Home Cooperative)

**Tanner Wise** of Dillwyn, VA—\$1,000 (Farmers Cooperative)

**Eleni Kasianides** of Round Hill, VA—\$500 (Loudoun County Cooperative)

**Makenna Garrett** of Bedford, VA—\$500 (Bedford Cooperative)

"With help from technology, we were able to keep the spirit of VICE alive, share information about Virginia's many cooperative businesses and fulfill the Council's mission of supporting youth education" said Adam Shiflett, VICE Committee chair.

The Council's executive secretary, Mary Howell, added, "Both last year's VICE scholarship winners and this year's have been offered an expenses-paid trip to participate in the Georgia Cooperative Council's Leadership Conference that will be held from July 19-23 in Covington, Georgia."

Next year's VICE is scheduled for **March 26-28, 2022** at Graves Mountain Lodge.

## 59th Annual Meeting recap

Over 30 cooperative leaders from across the Commonwealth took part in the Virginia Cooperative Council's 59th Annual Meeting, held virtually on March 2, 2021.

Hosted by Farm Credit of the Virginias using their Zoom account, the hour-long event featured an interactive presentation by Adam Ford of Rockingham Cooperative who detailed their 100 years of contributions to members, the community and fellow cooperatives. Participants had a chance to win door prizes that included "The House Cooperation Built," an illustrated history of Rockingham Cooperative, and 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary logo wear.

During the business portion of the meeting, members re-elected **Brad Brown** of Augusta Cooperative, **Dustin Francis** of Mecklenburg Cooperative and **Brian Wolfe** of Rappahannock Electric Cooperative to three-year terms on the Council's board of directors.

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## Bell Joins VCC Board

Rachel Bell, a relationship manager with Colonial Farm Credit since 2016, was elected to the Council's board of directors during the Annual Meeting on March 2. She succeeds Jim Belfield, who retired April 1 after more than two decades of service to the Council. Rachel is a graduate of Virginia Tech with a major in Agribusiness and minor in equine science. She and her parents are Rappahannock Electric Cooperative members who recently purchased a 10-acre property in Montpelier, renamed Maida Vale Farm, and purchase propane and supplies from their local Southern States Cooperative. "We board several horses in addition to my horse Mae, plus we plan to add chickens and cattle in the future," she said. In her free time, Rachel enjoys showing and trail riding, working in the garden, fishing and playing with her dog.



Rachel Bell

## Annual Meeting, continued

The board bid farewell to two long-time members, **Jim Belfield** of Colonial Farm Credit and **Richard Johnstone** of the Virginia, Maryland and Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives, who both retired on April 1.

**Brad Brown** was re-elected to serve as Council president for the coming year, along with **Adam Shiflett** of Farm Credit of the Virginias as vice president and **Jessica Harris** of MidAtlantic Farm Credit as secretary.

## Council Finance Update

The Virginia Cooperative Council ended 2020 with \$34,301.49 in expenses and \$16,219.89 in revenue over expense, reflecting the reduced cost of not being able to hold in-person events due to the COVID-19 pandemic. VCC's 2021 budget of \$52,456 was approved at the September 2020 board meeting. The Virginia Foundation for Cooperation ended 2020 with \$21,799.44 in expenses and assets totaling \$658,319.65, a net increase of \$21,463 from 2020. Legal notice of the Foundation's annual report was published in the May 9 *Richmond Times Dispatch*.

## Members in the news

In February, **Rockingham Cooperative** launched a year-long 100th anniversary celebration. Since its founding in 1921 by a group of farmers who banded together seeking to reduce the cost of fertilizer, this cooperative has grown to a \$100 million company. Adam Ford, marketing and social media specialist for the cooperative, explained that special events and exclusive member deals are planned throughout the summer and fall. To learn more, visit [www.rockinghamcoop.com](http://www.rockinghamcoop.com).

On April 1, **Brian Mosier** was promoted to become President & CEO of the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives. He succeeds Richard G. Johnstone, Jr, who retired April 1 after a 36-year career with the Association. Mosier has been with VMDAEC since 2013, during which time he has served as vice president of government affairs, vice president of member and government relations and chief operating officer. Brian previously worked with Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative in Chase City and Union Power Cooperative in North Carolina and earned his bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

As of April 5, **Fredericksburg Food Cooperative's new storefront** is open every day from 7 am to 9 pm at 320 Jefferson Davis Hwy in Fredericksburg. The cooperative has grown to more than 2,047 members. For more information, please visit their Facebook page or [www.fredericksburgfoodcoop.com](http://www.fredericksburgfoodcoop.com).

**EMPOWER Broadband**, the internet and telecommunications subsidiary of **Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative (MEC)**, recently installed high-speed internet using fiber-optic technology to its 1000th subscriber, Fountain Creek Baptist Church in Greenville County. Pastor Bobby Griles explained, "Our mission is sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Having broadband access provides the people of our church much needed resources and tools as we grow in God's grace together." EMPOWER Broadband currently serves subscribers in Halifax, Charlotte, Mecklenburg and Brunswick counties as well as Greenville, using the same cooperative principles as MEC to provide excellent service while keeping rates affordable.

On April 30, Giant Food launched the video "[Giant Clean Water Partnership](#)" that features a member of the **Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative Association**, who partnered with the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay and Giant Food. Part of the "Giant Cares" series, this episode shows how small actions made by a dairy farm located miles upstream from the Chesapeake Bay can make a huge difference to improve land and water quality, helping ensure farm sustainability for generations to come.

Want to share news from your cooperative? Email [mary.howell@sscoop.com](mailto:mary.howell@sscoop.com) or message the Council's Facebook page.

# The VICE Squad: Where are they now? **Jeremy Rowe**

This column profiles past attendees of the Virginia Institute for Cooperative Education (VICE). If you'd like to suggest a past VICE graduate to feature in an upcoming issue, please email the Council at [mary.howell@sscoop.com](mailto:mary.howell@sscoop.com).



Jeremy Rowe, participant in both 2004 VICE and NICE

## **What did participating in VICE mean to you?**

Words are not enough to describe what participating in VICE and the National Institute on Cooperative Education (NICE) meant to me. Coming from a small, rural high school in Augusta County, I loved meeting students from across the state and the U.S. I've taken much of what I've learned in cooperative education and applied it to my work in sales and management. Relationships made at both conferences have been equally valuable.

## **Do you have any favorite memories?**

I was blessed to not only win the VICE scholarship competition at Graves Mountain Lodge but also was selected as Outstanding Youth Scholar at the 2004 NICE competition. That recognition allowed me to return in 2005 as a student mentor at the NICE competition in Lexington, Kentucky. I got to lead my own team of students in the "Who's Minding the Store" simulation... and fortunately, our team came out on top! I loved seeing the excitement from everyone on the team and being a part of their experience.

## **How has participating in VICE influenced your career?**

My career evolved from education, as a teacher and administrator, to business management and sales. The principles I learned at VICE and NICE have been a great foundation that I've built into my working life. For those considering entrepreneurship and starting a small business, the co-op values and principles I learned through VICE/NICE are excellent building blocks to a new and exciting adventure!

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## Executive Secretary's message: Anticipating more in-person events

For the first time in our 59-year history, the Virginia Cooperative Council's Annual Meeting on March 2 was held virtually, via a Zoom hosting account and technical support generously provided by Farm Credit of the Virginias.

While not as much fun as seeing our members in person, this event successfully used technology to conduct annually required functions of our bylaws. We're grateful to keynote speaker Adam Ford of Rockingham Cooperative, whose interactive presentation celebrating that co-op's 100th anniversary gave participants a chance to test their knowledge of Virginia co-op history and win some great prizes.



Building on last year's experience, this spring we also promoted participation in a virtual edition of the Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education (VICE) to 16-19 year-olds across Virginia. Applicants completed an online test based on the "Welcome to Cooperatives" manual and videos about cooperatives, then submitted projects based on the cooperative of their choice.

Several students did an outstanding job, earning a total of \$5,000 in scholarships and an expense-paid trip to the Georgia Cooperative Council's Leadership Conference in July. We've been able to uphold our mission to educate Virginians about the role of cooperative businesses this past year, but I know I'm not alone in looking forward to holding VICE in person next year to share this great networking experience with many more students. Next year's VICE has been scheduled for March 26-28, 2022 at Graves Mountain Lodge, with applications to be available by the end of this year.

The Council's board of directors will next meet on June 15 to discuss dates and locations for our October 2021 Co-op Month event and March 2022 Annual Meeting. Please check our website, [www.virginia.coop](http://www.virginia.coop), and visit our Facebook page so you can learn more and add those events to your calendars.

To further our mission to increase awareness and understanding of cooperatives, consider inviting a Council representative to serve as a (free) speaker for an upcoming event with which you are involved. Given enough notice, we are happy to tailor our presentation to a particular audience in both length and content.

- Mary Howell

# State Fair of Virginia celebrates new Farm Credit Pavilion

A socially-distanced crowd gathered May 1 at The Meadow Event Park in Caroline County, Virginia for a ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating completion of the Farm Credit Pavilion. This modern livestock facility was built in partnership with the State Fair of Virginia and three Farm Credit associations serving Virginia—Colonial Farm Credit, MidAtlantic Farm Credit and Farm Credit of the Virginias.

The partially-enclosed 42,000-square-foot Pavilion includes 675 square feet of climate-controlled offices and restrooms, and will be available year-round to hold ag-related events, including opportunities for youth to engage and compete.

Attendees included Bettina Ring, Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, as well as representatives from the Virginia Farm Bureau, Farm Credit and the State Fair of Virginia.



Brad Cornelius, CEO of Farm Credit of the Virginias, said, “The new Farm Credit pavilion is sure to encourage and enrich youth agricultural participation, both at the annual State Fair and at various agricultural events throughout the year.”

**Welcome to our newest individual members!**

**Richard & Blair Johnstone**

**Individual membership is \$25/year and open to all co-op retirees and others not currently employed by a Virginia Cooperative Council member co-op. The application is online at [www.virginia.coop](http://www.virginia.coop).**

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