

# CO-OP CONNECTIONS



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

Fall 2021

## Longtime leaders honored

James Graves received the Council's 2021 Cooperative Leadership Award in a surprise presentation on Sept. 30 during the Co-op Month Breakfast at The Place in Glen Allen, with his wife Rachel and many friends present.

Growing up in Madison County, Jimmy followed in the family's hospitality and orchard businesses and has long been a member of several local cooperatives. Shortly after his marriage, he joined the Council board in 1967 when his father stepped down, serving as Council President from 1974-1975 and 2001-2002. His family began hosting the Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education (VICE) in the mid-1970s.

"It's hard to imagine that anyone could exceed Jimmy's record of service to Virginia cooperatives," said Council President Brad Brown of Augusta Cooperative. "We are truly fortunate to have his whole family's support, and their contributions made VICE memorable to generations of Virginians."

The Council also honored Greg White of Tappahannock for his 43 years of service to Virginia cooperatives. After earning his electrical engineering



Jimmy Graves (L), shown with President Brad Brown, accepted his Cooperative Leadership Award at the Sept. 30 Co-op Month Breakfast.

Cooperative, power supplier to electric co-ops in three states, and the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives.

Greg spent 15 years as CEO of Northern Neck Electric Cooperative, achieving the rare "Cooperative Trifecta" of serving in a leadership role at a local distribution cooperative, a generation and transmission cooperative, and a cooperative trade association.

"Greg continues to be a faithful Council supporter," added Brad Brown.



Greg White (L), with President Brad Brown, also received the Cooperative Leadership Award at the Co-op Month Breakfast in Glen Allen, Va.

degree and starting his career in Florida, the Mathews County native accepted a position with Virginia Electric Cooperative (VEC) in Bowling Green. VEC merged with Northern Piedmont Electric Cooperative in 1980 to form Rappahannock Electric Cooperative, with Greg named Manager of Planning Engineering. He went on to work in upper management for both Old Dominion Electric

## Mark your calendars!

- Annual Meeting set for March 3, 2022 in Staunton
- VA Institute on Cooperative Education (VICE) applications due February 18, 2022

# Board approves bylaws update; vote set for 2022 Annual Meeting

At its June 15, 2021 meeting, the Council's board of directors discussed updating the Council's bylaws to more accurately reflect the current composition of the board.

"The Executive Committee agreed that the requirement to have three representatives from each type of cooperative was difficult to achieve in practice, and that having one member from each type of cooperative would serve the intent of the bylaws," explained President Brad Brown. He noted that the Council equally benefits from a board whose members have diverse career experience. At the Sept. 29 meeting, the board approved changes to Article VI as shown below. A final vote to adopt the proposed bylaws update will be held March 3, 2022 at the Annual Meeting.

**Proposed 2021 revision to Article VI**  
**BYLAWS OF THE**  
**VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE COUNCIL, INC.**  
*Founded in 1962; Revised in 2009*

## **ARTICLE VI: DIRECTORS**

**SECTION 1. Number and qualification.** (a) The business of the Council shall be managed, conducted and controlled by a Board of Directors consisting of **up to twelve (12) directors elected by a representative from each member organization** ~~cooperative delegates from their own number and three (3) public directors appointed by the Director of the State Agricultural Extension Service. The three (3) public directors do not need to be members of the Council or affiliated with member associations but they shall have the same powers and rights of the directors elected by the cooperative delegates.~~ No person shall be eligible to serve in succession more than three (3) three-year terms but can be re-elected to the board after a one (1) year break in service on the board.

**SECTION 2. Election of Directors.** **Those considered for election to the board shall represent all classes of member cooperatives, such that the board includes at least one representative from a marketing cooperative, one from a purchasing cooperative and one from a service cooperative** ~~At all times there shall be at least three (3) members of the Board of Directors who are representatives from purchasing cooperatives, three (3) who are representatives from marketing cooperatives, two (2) who are representatives from service cooperatives, and three (3) at large directors.~~

---

## Beckett discusses development of new cooperatives



**Thomas Beckett of Carolina Common Enterprise addresses Co-op Month Breakfast attendees as Gerald Anderson looks on.**

Thomas Beckett, founder and Executive Director of Carolina Common Enterprise, shared his work to help start new co-ops as keynote speaker at the Sept. 30 Co-op Month breakfast.

After earning his law degree from the University of North Carolina and an MBA from UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School, Beckett became focused on the potential role of cooperatives in our economy during the banking collapse of 2007-2008. He and his partner established a Raleigh-based cooperative development center in 2012, and for the past seven years successfully applied for USDA funding to aid North Carolinians establish their own co-op businesses. These have included worker and housing cooperatives, along with artisans wishing to collectively market their products. As with co-ops founded in the 20th century, his clients hope to increase gain improved services and more equitable income through this business model. In his introduction, Gerald Anderson of newly formed Fredericksburg Food Cooperative noted how local ownership and control sets co-ops apart.



# VICE participants: Where are they now?

*This column profiles past attendees of the Virginia Institute for Cooperative Education (VICE), as well as recipients of the Council's Scroggs-Raper Scholarships. Please contact VCC if you'd like to suggest a someone to feature in an upcoming issue!*

## Ben Garber, data analyst for A2F Consulting

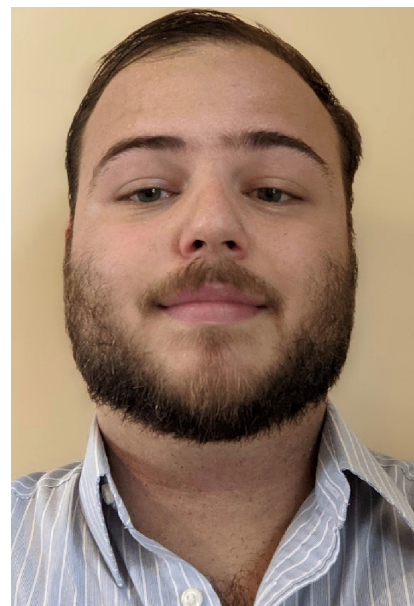
### What did participating in VICE mean to you?

My high school agriculture teacher, Eric Stogdale, encouraged me to attend VICE in 2015, and I'm incredibly glad he did. My experiences that weekend, including the agribusiness management game, team building and leadership activities, were actually what got me interested in agricultural economics as a career. As an alumnus, I've tried to give back to the program, helping grade tests and run the simulation game for VICE and NICE. I took video footage during the 2019 VICE so that others can better understand what a meaningful experience it is! (Visit VCC's Facebook page to watch the VICE video from Ben's footage).

### How did your studies at Virginia Tech lead to your career?

Majoring in agricultural economics gave me the interests and skills that put me exactly in my current position. AAEC not only gave me the analytical tools necessary to thrive in the industry, but also a lens to the wider world. Working for that department meant a chance to work with farmers outside the U.S., such as in the Andes Mountains of Ecuador, as well as with Virginia farmers. The professors and other students were all very passionate people who wanted the best for those they served with their teaching and research, and I've tried to carry that forward. After 6 years and two degrees from AAEC, it was that combination of passion, practical experience, and technical skills that helped me land my current position as a data analyst at A2F Consulting, an international development consulting firm.

**What advice do you have for those considering a career in agriculture?** Stay passionate, be flexible, and make the most out of every opportunity! Sometimes that might be a new job or a study abroad you've been holding out for, but a simple conversation with someone new can be equally important.



Ben Garber, 2015 VICE participant and 2016-2018 Scroggs-Raper Scholarship recipient.

## Executive Secretary's Message: Gearing up for 2022 VICE

Nearly 40 VCC members gathered Sept. 30 in Glen Allen for our Co-op Month Breakfast, the Council's first gathering in more than 18 months. Attendees enjoyed an inspirational address from Thomas Beckett, Executive Director of the Raleigh, NC-based Carolina Common Enterprise, and celebrated our Cooperative Leadership Award winners Jimmy Graves and Greg White. While Alex White, our Young Cooperator Award winner, was attending college out-of-state and unable to join us, Council representatives plan to present him with his award in December, when he's home for the holidays.

To increase awareness of Virginia cooperatives during Co-op Month, the Council sent out media releases and held a social media campaign with daily Facebook posts.



Retirees Carolyn & Greg White (at front) recently joined the Council as individuals; Greg was honored at the Co-op Month Breakfast.

As this year draws to a close, we're beginning preparations for next year's Virginia Institute on Cooperative Education (VICE), set to be held in person from March 25-27, 2022 at Graves Mountain Lodge in Madison County. We're not only updating some of the presentation materials and tests, but also seeking volunteers to help with the breakout sessions on different types of co-operatives held on Friday afternoon. Please contact me if you're interested and able to help out!

Look to receive your membership renewal notice before year's end. We greatly appreciate our member co-ops who support VICE by sponsoring at least one student (\$350 per attendee). As we've expanded our college scholarship program in recent years, please also consider making a tax-deductible gift to the Virginia Foundation of Cooperation to support the Scroggs-Raper Scholarship program.

Wishing everyone a safe, happy and healthy holiday season!

- Mary Howell

# Virginia electric co-ops sponsor first Girl Power Camp

On Sept. 22, 11 high school girls got a taste of what it's like to be an electric utility line worker at the first-ever Girl Power Camp, hosted by the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives, with four electric cooperative members of the Council participating.

The students traveled from as far as Winchester and the Northern Neck to the Electric Cooperative Training Center in Fluvanna County for an immersive exposure to the job of maintaining and repairing electric distribution lines. They gained hands-on experience in climbing poles, stringing wire, operating a bucket truck and using a hot stick on a de-energized circuit.

The also heard from several speakers about the cooperative business model and career opportunities in this field. Gena Boarman of Northern Neck Electric Cooperative, the first female line worker at a Virginia co-op, shared her story. Associate members of the VMD Association walked students through the equipment and roles their businesses play in the industry. Pam Taylor from Southside Virginia Community College next outlined their Power Line Worker Training Program, a collaboration between the school and cooperatives.

"What they're doing here is amazing," said Ashley Knapp of Altec. "I think it's important that we pull diversity into an industry that's not be diverse until here recently."

—contributed by Steve Johnson, VMD Association

*At right, Gena Boarman, a line worker at Northern Neck Electric Cooperative, coaches a Girl Power Camp participant on using gaffs strapped to her boots and a fall protection safety harness to climb an electric pole.*

*Below, Electric Cooperative Training Center instructor J.T. Jacobs shows a high schooler how to operate a hot stick to safely perform maintenance on electric distribution lines.*

*Photos by Jim Robertson of the VMD Association, visit <https://youtu.be/26Q-ltdyUz0> for a video of this event.*



## Virginia Cooperative Council

P.O. Box 25202

Richmond, VA 23260