

Industry Veteran Dave Kresock Joins WEC as Director of Engineering & Operations

"I love this industry. Not a day goes by I don't learn something," said Dave Kresock, who brought more than 30 years of experience in cable construction and utility systems when he started as WEC's Director of Engineering & Operations on June 1. Kresock's unique mix of expertise makes him a perfect fit to lead WEC's operations on the verge of broadband rollout, said General Manager Patty Richards; plus, his mindset aligns with WEC's cooperative principles. "Dave is a super guy, a great team person, and he knows his stuff," she said.

Skills & background

Kresock came to WEC after five years leading Stowe Electric's operations team. A lifelong resident of Randolph, Kresock's career began as a project manager for a cable distribution company in Bethel, where he worked with the Rural Utility Service on outside construction projects—including fiberoptic cable construction. He then went to Vermont Technical College to pursue an Associate degree in

electrical engineering technology.

That led Kresock to Burlington Electric Department (BED),

One of the reasons I was interested in coming to WEC is because they've made the decision to make things better for members by deploying fiber.

— Dave Kresock

where he supervised systems technicians, including control room operators, power technicians in the field, and communications technicians, including one monitoring BED's fiberoptic network.

Kresock was at BED during the municipal utility's fiber rollout. While fiber installation certainly supports customers by making high speed internet

available at homes and businesses, it also vastly improves a utility's internal operations. BED connected all substations, generating plants, and other key equipment, providing floods of new data to its SCADA system (Supervisory Control And Data Acquisition, the acronym for control and monitoring systems used by utilities and other essential service industries).

Installing fiber throughout BED's infrastructure "gave Burlington a leap into the future," Kresock said, related to its grid connectivity and

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Dave Kresock recently joined WEC as Director of Engineering & Operations. "We want to bring in people who know how to problem solve, and Dave has demonstrated years of it," said General Manager Patty Richards.

Stay for Lunch

Twin Valley Senior Center welcomes back central Vermont seniors and community members

More than anything, Doris Washburn of East Montpelier looked forward to socializing again when the Twin Valley Senior Center reopened on July 7. "I got very lonely after 15 months home alone, and I'm really looking forward to seeing my friends there," she said, before the opening celebration. Washburn, whose 93rd birthday was July 25, loves the center's singalongs, puzzles, and card games in particular. "I'm a cribbage player," she said. Cribbage is popular among the center regulars, but it tends to be a guys' game, she said; before the pandemic, she was the only woman who played.

Over in Marshfield, center regular Merv Spooner also looked forward to cribbage starting up again. "I was one of four cribbage players, but my

Community Fund Profile

partner died. It's down to three of us," he reflected. "There's this one lady who plays cribbage. Maybe she'll join us."

Rita Copeland, the senior center's director, planned a soft opening on July 7 to reacquaint patrons, and a public celebration a week later to reintroduce the center to the community. "People can come here and eat lunch with the seniors and see what we're all about," she said. "We cover six towns, so I'd like to hear from community members. What do they want their senior center to be like? What do they want for services? What can we do better? And we have a desperate need for volunteers. Our meals keep expanding, which is a good thing."

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Washington Electric Cooperative

East Montpelier, VT 05651

Inside

Craft & commerce with 1.5 mbs: Members Jeanne Bisson and Ikuzi Teraki of Romulus Craft moved their market online during the pandemic. Not easy with slow internet. P. 5.

Guide the change: Learn about new Board President Steve Knowlton's vision for leading WEC. P. 6.

A portrait of broadband rollout: Member John Lyman captured WEC crews preparing infrastructure for broadband rollout. See his photo essay on p. 8.



WEC Member Merv Spooner of Marshfield claims to be crabby, but he's glad to be back at the Twin Valley Senior Center. The Senior Center is supported by an annual gift from WEC's Community Fund. See the full list of recipients on p. 4.

President's and General Manager's Message

Steve Knowlton Joins Patty at the Mic

Single digit rate increase anticipated in 2022, updates in staffing, broadband rollout, Community Fund activities, and WEC's office welcomes back members

Steve Knowlton begins as WEC Board President

Patty: Steve is not a new face to us, but he's newly taking over the role of Board President. I want to start out by recognizing Barry Bernstein for more than 20 years serving the Co-op in that role. Steve brings new spirit and new energy, and I'm looking forward to taking on some new efforts as we move forward and build on Barry's successes.

I do think it's good to have new people in leadership. It brings a fresh perspective and stimulates innovation, and that's a good thing. Just like my stepping down in January, when a new GM will bring new thoughts and

innovation and energy, and that's a great thing for a member-owned cooperative.

Steve: I'm honored to succeed Barry as President. WEC has seen a lot of major changes as a result of his leadership. He helped WEC divest from nuclear power and get out of its Vermont Yankee contract. He pushed WEC to be more renewable, so that by 2014, with his foresight in proceeding with the Coventry landfill gas to electricity generation plant, WEC's power portfolio became 100 percent renewable—a distinction it holds in Vermont with just Burlington Electric Department and Swanton. He's got a great legacy.

Every person who steps into a new

leadership position has to find her or his own voice and way in accepting the responsibilities of leading an organization forward. What's constant, though, is WEC has a mission and a vision and values and a strategic plan. Those transcend and outlive the service of any leader, so WEC is going to keep rolling along with what it has decided its role is going to be in this community, and that guides any leader's choices.

What I can promise is continuity to our members. I won't govern exactly the same way as Barry, but I intend to be a responsible and active leader of our Co-op's Board, and I intend to govern in such a way as to make it easy for the next person to step up as President.

likely to contribute to rate pressure as well.

Steve: Just to point to a recent success that may reduce future rate pressure, WEC will receive a property tax waiver on broadband infrastructure if we roll it out in conjunction with a communication union district (CUD), or an internet service provider (ISP) that is working in contract with a CUD. That's due to bill H.360, which started with Patty and Barry. So this is about reducing the property tax burden on not for profit, public oriented broadband service providers and their partners. It's not a blanket exemption, because it requires us to work with our CUD partners and their service providers, as we plan to do.

Patty: That's right. More on broadband in just a minute.

Welcome to new staff

Patty: We have had several staff positions open up. It has been a top priority to get positions filled, and we are working intensely on this front. Thus far we have hired five employees in the past month.

Dave Kresock started June 1 as Director of Operations and Engineering and has hit the ground running, spending significant time on broadband, working with operations staff, and getting to know the WEC system. He is a welcome addition to the WEC team, and we are excited to have him join us!

Josh Pierce is our new Mechanic. Josh has been working for the town of St. Johnsbury and comes to us with a great mechanical background. You know how I like personalities, and Josh sure appears to have one.

We have two new Apprentice Lineworkers: Ryan Saboruin, who's moving here from Charlotte, North Carolina, and Gordon Chandler, who comes to us from another electric cooperative in Georgia.

Our new Administrative Assistant is Rosie Casciero. We're excited to welcome her. Dawn Johnson is training Rosie while she is training for her new position as Plant Accountant.

Steve: Yes, fortunately, Dawn is not leaving WEC. As Plant Accountant

Patty: A big shoutout to Barry for all he's done. I'm really looking forward to the next six months with Steve, helping bring on the next GM, and watching new leadership take off. The future is bright at WEC.

Rate increase forecasted for 2022

Patty: This is a heads up that we anticipate needing a single digit rate increase in 2022. The driver is loss of grant funding. We received \$843,000 in federal grants during COVID. That was a onetime windfall and pushed off our need for a rate increase this year. We'll crunch numbers over next several months, but it's likely we'll need to increase rates in 2022.

Steve: My understanding is we're not the only Vermont utility needing to increase rates to provide service to our customers. The grants this past year helped bridge a gap, but right now, labor costs are going up, power supply costs are increasing, and various forms of taxes are going up, too.

Patty: Another factor is members struggling to pay bills. We mitigated a lot of this for 2021, when the state covered past-due utility bills for people who couldn't pay for COVID-related reasons, but we have some past due accounts that have really grown. Typically, we have about \$90,000 outstanding from bills 60 plus days late. Now we're out about \$240,000. That's

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WEC is part of the alliance working to advance and support the principles of cooperatives in Vermont.

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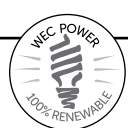
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The Board of Directors' regularly scheduled meetings are on the last Wednesday of each month, in the evening. Members are welcome to attend. Members who wish to discuss a matter with the Board should contact the president through WEC's office. Meeting dates and times are subject to change. For information about times and/or agenda, or to receive a copy of the minutes of past meetings, contact Administrative Assistant Rosie Casciero, at 224-2332, or visit wec.coop/board-of-directors.

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Letter to the editor, comment, or a story tip? Drop us a line at currents@wec.coop or Washington Electric Cooperative, Inc., P.O. Box 8, East Montpelier, VT 05651, Attn: Co-op Currents.



she'll get to indulge more in some of her passions, which are numbers and spreadsheets, so that's great. I think she'll be happy as a clam.

Patty: Exactly, a new task to keep her energized and engaged in all things WEC. In the meantime, we're still recruiting and interviewing for the CFO, Senior Accountant, and Operations Manager positions. They're all posted on wec.coop.

Steve and I were talking earlier about how the turnover is not unique to WEC. Companies nationwide are seeing increased employee turnover. Folks are evaluating their lives, and COVID made people pause and think about making changes in the way they work and how they spend their time. It's a widespread phenomenon right now.

Steve: A lot of change at once can be disconcerting, but change is inevitable. Overall, it's basically a good thing: bringing in new blood and new skills. For our outgoing staff, people who have served us so long and are moving on to other things, they're all landing well and doing things that are good for them. This is WEC with new faces, but it's still WEC.

COVID update

Patty: The great news is our doors are open again! Staff are here! No masks required! We opened doors on June 1 and have been offering full service to members coming into the office.

The only thing we ask is if you are sick, put on a mask or better yet use virtual means to reach us. Even the common cold can be really cut down; that's one of the lessons we learned from masking up this past year. You can always still reach us by phone or email, which'll save you gas if you aren't yet driving an EV.



We received \$843,000 in federal grants during COVID that pushed off our need for a rate increase this year. That shortfall is going to show up.

— Patty Richards

Steve: We're not out of the woods yet, but it's good to see normal life starting to return, and hopefully the lessons learned are sticking with us.

Patty: Well said.

Steve: It is interesting to see how we can adapt to new situations and roll with the punches if we agree to act together for the common good. This is a lesson we all learn in how to make a civilization work reasonably well. It doesn't occur naturally; we all have to do our part. I call it "practical patriotism."

Community Fund activities

Patty: Every July, we're required to report on the activities of the Community Fund from the previous year. This issue you'll see the list of local nonprofits who received Community Fund grants in 2020. We're spotlighting the Twin Valley Senior Center, who opened their doors with fanfare in early July.

Steve: My mom is now living at Westview Meadows in Montpelier. I asked her to move up from North Carolina because she's almost 100 now. When Westview went into lockdown, it was awfully hard on a lot of people. As a former army wife, my mom is pretty resilient. But it's poignant that older people depend on a lot of support from their community, and when that's taken away by the pandemic, it can have a serious effect. It gave me a better appreciation for what a lot of facilities and centers do, providing care, activities, and meals for older people who might not have the mobility and wherewithal to get around anymore. I'm very glad we've been able to support Twin Valley Senior Center because COVID really brought out where the stress points in our communities are, and they've been able to serve our seniors through it.

Patty: The senior center is a special organization and one we've long supported. Just a shout out to all the members who donate their capital credits to the Community Fund. It's a really important program. It's a way for WEC to aggregate small donation dollars and distribute them to organizations in central Vermont. We tend to stay away from those that have secure funding sources; we're looking for small groups that fill in the gaps. As Steve said, seniors need their communities to be there for them, and WEC's generous members and our volunteer fund committee make sure we do our part.

Broadband filing with lenders, PUC in coming months

Steve: WEC is making progress moving toward a practical solution in its goal to providing access to broadband service to all its members, particularly those underserved at the present time. As we've talked about in the past, we're doing this in partnership CUDs and the ISPs that they contract with.

WEC's contribution is intended to string up what's called the "middle mile" of fiber. That is to say, it stops just before it gets to the house, and then the CUDs would hook you up if you choose to subscribe to their service. WEC is proposing to provide this through a loan through our lender, the USDA program Rural Utility Service (RUS).

For WEC it'll be a major undertaking



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— Steve Knowlton

in terms of cost, so it's important we get it right as we construct this partnership so everyone knows what they have to do. I think we've arranged it so everyone does what they're good at. WEC is not an ISP, and it's not in our mission or skill set to pioneer it at this time, especially while we're partnering with not for profit CUDs.

So we're pressing ahead. It's a complex issue by any means, especially when you're in a partnership, and everybody is pulling their own weight, and we all want to make sure we're pulling in the same direction to get affordable broadband for all our members.

Patty: We've hired a project coordinator with fiber expertise to help us out: Nicholas Pascaretti. He's been on board a

couple of weeks and he's getting into the details and crunching numbers. As we move from concept to reality, everyone here is involved. Barry is still doing a ton of work, Dave Kresock has jumped in with both feet, finance folks, legal, and Bill Powell, the Energy Coach.

Steve and I talked this morning, and our new motto is Path To Success. Figure out how to get from here to fiber on the poles. We're continuing to work our way through the analysis and expect to file with our lender in the next few months. PUC will have a say in this and we'll file with them in the next few months as well. There's a lot of work behind the scenes here. 

ENERGY COACH SAYS:

Incentives for Home Energy Improvements

Efficiency Vermont has lots of incentives available right now, and has reduced barriers to making your home more efficient.

Do you rent your home? You can still access certain incentives.

Concerned about affordability? You may qualify for increased rebates and zero percent financing.

And yes, there are incentives available for ACs and heat pumps (which heat in the winter and cool in the summer).

Learn more at efficiencyvermont.com/rebates, and contact me to learn how you can stack Efficiency Vermont incentives with WEC's incentives (see p. 7): energycoach@wec.coop.



What's your internet story?

As WEC works to make high speed internet available to all members, *Co-op Currents* is looking for stories from members about the role broadband—or the lack of it—plays in their lives. Drop us a line at currents@wec.coop.

**Go Green.
Go Electric.
Go WEC!**



Twin Valley

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Food & friendship

The senior center is a Meals on Wheels hub for central Vermont. While the doors closed for the duration of the pandemic in order to comply with state orders and protect the seniors it serves, the kitchen stayed open under kitchen manager Sarah Zettlemeier, and drivers kept delivering fresh and frozen meals three days a week.

Fred Wilber, a Meals on Wheels volunteer driver and Twin Valley Senior Center board member, said necessarily strict safety precautions changed how he interacted with clients. When both food and relationships are essential to our lives, it was hard to deliver one and withhold the other. “I just left the food in a cooler that was outside the door, so there was no contact at all,” he said. “That made it really hard, and that’s what I missed, and that’s what I think a lot of the seniors liked in addition to receiving the meals: the daily contact. A lot of my clients don’t see anybody other than me.”

Eventually, Copeland said, the senior center began offering popular clinics again, like the foot clinic, flu clinic, and free tax clinic, bringing

in partners like Vermont Home Health & Hospice and AARP and maintaining safety protocols. But the center’s fundamental purpose is to be a gathering space, and while it’s not as easy to quantify friendship as other human needs, Copeland and her board and patrons all felt the absence of social connection. “The communication, the socialization is just as important as anything, healthwise,” Copeland asserted.

That’s why she decided to host the public opening during lunch. Lunch

I feel it’s a wonderful benefit for me, because I meet new people, and I do things with other people, and I get a good meal.

Doris Washburn

is part of what makes Twin Valley Senior Center special. Other senior centers offer activities, Copeland pointed out, but without the opportunity to break bread together, people come for a program and then leave. At Twin Valley, the option to share a meal means people stick around after the program they came for. Activities and socializing

and eating together create a campus vibe. “I feel it’s a wonderful benefit for me, because I meet new people, and I do things with other people, and I get a good meal,” declared Washburn. That’s the feedback Copeland receives, too. “People walk through the door who haven’t been here, and they tell me what a warm, welcoming place it is, and people are so friendly,” she said.



Left: Looking forward to the Twin Valley Senior Center reopening, Doris Washburn said, “it’s going to be a celebration.” Here she is enjoying the Senior Center’s open house on July 14. WEC’s Community Fund makes grants to the Senior Center every year; even when its doors were closed, the Senior Center delivered healthy meals for local seniors through Meals on Wheels. At right, Walter Bothfield, a WEC member from Cabot, laughing with friends at the Twin Valley Senior Center open house on July 14.

Long range planning

Based right on Route 2 in East Montpelier, Twin Valley Senior Center serves Cabot, Calais, East Montpelier, Marshfield, Plainfield, Woodbury, “and surrounding towns,” according to its website, so it draws visitors from a wide swath of central Vermont. The center moved from Marshfield to its current location about six years ago and was planning a campaign to build an addition before the pandemic put that on hold. “We have grand plans for huge changes,” said Wilber, “but of course that requires money, and that’s in short supply.”


The senior center does benefit from strong partnerships, said Rita Copeland. It’s a partner with Vermont Council on Aging, which provides bus service and distributes federal funds under the Older Americans act. “They pay us \$3.56 per meal for doing Meals on Wheels,” she said. Each meal’s actual cost is between \$10-12, and the difference is made up from recipients’ donations and community supporters.

Those supporters include WEC’s Community Fund. The Community Fund, which is entirely supported by volunteer contributions from the membership, makes annual grants to the Twin Valley Senior Center. Copeland is grateful for the reliable gift. “Every penny counts. Everybody has

a hand in this. It’s the community’s center,” she said.

That is a perspective Wilber hopes to focus on in this new era. “I’d like to think of it more as a community center that integrates people of all ages. To broaden the appeal of the center,” he suggested. “One of my goals as a board member is to bring more people of my persuasion, seniors who don’t think of ourselves as seniors.”

Like a lot of scrappy organizations that survived the pandemic, Twin Valley Senior Center is taking stock and looking to the future. It will take funding, vision, and dedicated helpers to bring the center to its new phase.

But before the good hard work, it’s party time. And everyone at Twin Valley was ready for a party. Some things have changed: friends have died or are homebound, new people have moved to the area. Doris Washburn knows she’ll need a little more help getting around than she did before. “I can’t carry my meal back. A lot can happen in 15 months when you’re up in your 90s,” she said. But returning to the center is the main thing: to laugh and take exercise classes, to share a meal and play cards with friends again. That first day back, she said, “it’s going to be a celebration.” 

About WEC’s Community Fund

WEC’s Community Fund is made up entirely of member contributions. About 1,400 members choose to donate their capital credits to the Community Fund; others make donations out of pocket. This generosity allows WEC’s fund to make grants to small nonprofits in the Co-op’s service area. In 2020, the fund distributed more than \$50,000 to nonprofits improving the lives and environment of people in our communities.

To learn how to donate your capital credits, or to make a contribution to WEC’s Community Fund, call 802-223-2322 or email Rosie Casciero at rosie.casciero@wec.coop.

WEC Community Fund 2020 Grant Recipients

Barre Partnership	Mad River Valley Rotary Club
Bradford Public Library	Montpelier Alive
Brookfield Community Partnership	Peacham Library
Cabot Community Association	Plainfield Historical Society
Cabot Ride the Ridges	Prevent Child Abuse Vermont
Capstone Community Action	Rural Vermont
Center for an Agricultural Economy	Salvation Farms
Central Vermont Adult Basic Education	Studio Place Arts
Central Vermont Council on Aging	Stuff a Truck
Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice	T.W. Wood Gallery
Central Vermont Humane Society	Teen Challenge New England
Champlain Valley Exposition	Teen Challenge, Johnson, VT
Chelsea Public Library	Toy Joy & Toys for Tots
Connecting Hope	Twin Valley Senior Center
Council on Aging Northeast Kingdom	Twinfield Student Voice Project
Danville Chamber of Commerce	Twinfield Together Mentoring Program
Earthwalk Vermont	Upper Valley Haven
Ecoforesters	Vermont Community Garden Network
Faith in Action	Vermont Community Loan Fund
Family Center of Washington County	Vermont Council on Rural Development
Fourth Grade Foresters - Arbor Day	Vermont Foodbank
Friends of Mad River	Vermont Granite Museum Stone Arts School
Girls/Boyz Mentoring First	Vermont Historical Society
Good Beginnings of Central Vermont	Washington County Mental Health Services
Good Samaritan Haven	West Topsham Food Shelf
Green Mountain Council Boy Scouts of America	WGDR Goddard College Community Radio
Green Mountain United Way	White Rock Productions
Hardwick Area Food Pantry	Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District
Hunger Free Vermont	Youth Equestrian Development Association
Jaquith Public Library	
Just Basics	
Kellogg-Hubbard Library	

About Twin Valley Senior Center

Twin Valley Senior Center serves seniors in Cabot, Calais, East Montpelier, Marshfield, Plainfield, Woodbury, and surrounding towns. All ages are welcome and veterans are encouraged to join.

Transportation is available for seniors in the six towns served. While some activities and events carry a fee, the senior center collects no annual dues. Seniors of all economic situations are welcome and encouraged to participate.

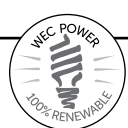
Hours: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 9 AM - 2 PM.

Meals on Wheels delivers healthy home cooking to residents. Twin Valley Senior Center serves about 1,000 meals per month to local seniors.

For more information, call 802-223-3322.

To support Twin Valley Senior Center with a donation or volunteer interest, call Rita Copeland at 802-223-3322, visit twinvalleyseniors.org/ donate, or send a check to:

Twin Valley Senior Center
PO Box 152, East Montpelier, VT 05651



Pivoting to an Online Marketplace— With 1.5 Mbs Download Speed

Porcelain artists and WEC members Jeanne Bisson & Ikuzi Teraki of Romulus Craft on how high speed internet could preserve their market and reduce their carbon footprint

Jeanne Bisson and Ikuzi Teraki founded Romulus Craft in Oakland in 1979, and ever since then, they've traveled to trade shows around the country selling their functional porcelain—tableware, vases, and sculptural pieces—to wholesalers and customers. At least, until the 2020 American Craft Council show in Baltimore. "That was our last contact with customers," said Teraki. "Since then we haven't had any direct contact with our market, except internet."

Based in the Orange County town of Washington since 1986, Bisson and Teraki were used to a quiet home and studio in contrast to time spent exhibiting in city museums and halls. But when the pandemic forced their market online, they discovered the limitations of being exclusively rural. First, said Teraki, their download speed is at best 1.5 megabits per second—and upload speeds are half that. That poses a problem when they need to update their website with photos of pieces currently available for sale.

On top of that, said Bisson, they needed to establish an online shop in order to sell their pieces online—a difficult task, with internet that slow.

Finally, there's the matter of cultivating a rapport with customers, which Bisson says is crucial. "If I'm talking to someone on the phone who's called us and is interested in looking at the site with me and is asking questions, and I'm waiting to get on and trying to carry on a normal conversation so we can get a feel for each other," she said, the slowness of the website and the inability to simply view a piece together interrupts a human connection that should be fluid and constructive. "There's something very powerful in the exchange," she mused. "Romulus is not just commodities; it's a way of life. My challenge is how to keep the human part of all of this."

Of course, real life is even better than talking on the phone about an art object viewed over the internet. "I don't think we'll ever substitute images over the internet with our actual pieces. We need to be there with people, and people need to handle our pieces," said Teraki. "No matter how good the image is, you can't feel it."

But if faster internet means a better way to tell their story online, they like the idea of reducing future travel. Because, said Bisson, "we're not the only ones on this earth." They're aware that the absence of travel has reduced their carbon footprint dramatically.

Benefit to all

"We did not move to Vermont because of high speed internet," noted



Jeanne Bisson and Ikuzi Teraki in their studio. With trade shows for their exquisite porcelain shut down during the pandemic, they moved their marketplace online. They like having a smaller carbon footprint, but to sustain a business online, they need faster internet than just 1.5 mbs download speed.

Bisson drily. She grew up working on her family's farm in Barre, where her job was to raise the calves. After graduating from Goddard, she moved west, teaching at a Montessori school in Tucson and then studying glassblowing in Oakland. Teraki grew up in Kyoto, Japan, in a family of artists who hand-painted kimonos. He became a potter and studied in Canada before moving to Berkeley to work in a pottery studio. They met, blowing glass and making pottery side by side, before transitioning entirely to ceramics. When their daughter was two, and they were surrounded by old factory buildings and train tracks in a part of Oakland where "it was a usual occurrence that you might lose tires and your battery from your car," according to Bisson, they decided to move to Vermont.

At the time, Teraki said, "we changed the location, but the market was very much the same." Around half of their market business was wholesale, and they'd meet buyers at trade shows who would place orders. With limited opportunities for retail sales in Vermont, they knew they'd have to travel a lot. "We do some of the top of the line shows: Smithsonian, American Craft Council, the new one is the St. Croix potters' tour. People come from around the world. All these shows

Romulus Craft porcelain on romuluscraftstudio.com.



have closed down. So," said Bisson, "now we need to be online."

For people whose way of life incorporates handcraft, appreciating the gifts of the earth, and bringing goods to market, they view their current situation with balance and nuance. "Yes, there's waste in this new technology and corralling. But it is part of our culture now. The internet should not strip us of the things we do with our hands. We need to accept what each tool in the toolbox has to give to you and to use those tools in the most beneficial way to all. By having this internet and us not having to travel, we've walked a little lighter on the earth," mused Bisson. With this perspective, they've decided, the small change that would bring the biggest benefit to all is to have better internet service. Even

10 mbs would help, and fiber would bring speeds perhaps a hundred times faster than that, but it won't come easily from internet providers looking to make a profit. Teraki recently spoke with a corporate internet service provider, who quoted him \$190 a month for 3 mbs: in other words, double their extremely slow speed, for five times the cost. That wasn't worth it. For now, 1.5 mbs is "doable, but frustrating," acknowledged Teraki. But for the long term, "this is our main connection to making our living," Bisson said. "Having reliable steady internet is critical to our preservation." 🐼

Romulus Craft studio is in Washington and online at romuluscraftstudio.com. For more information: 802-685-3869.

“Guide the Change”

WEC’s new President, Steve Knowlton, lays out his vision

At WEC’s Board of Directors meeting on May 26, Steve Knowlton assumed Presidency of the Board, succeeding Barry Bernstein after his 22 years of service in that role. A month earlier, General Manager Patty Richards announced her plan to leave her role in early 2022, and since both announcements, several staff members have retired, changed career paths, or left for other opportunities.

While this degree of turnover is widespread across all types of industries after a seismically challenging 18 months, WEC is a close-knit organization that regularly celebrates 20 and 30 year work anniversaries and has several Directors who have served for multiple decades. Change, especially a lot at once, can be unsettling.

And yet, said the presidentially calm Knowlton, change is natural, and change holds opportunities. “We have to recognize change, especially turnover in staff and board membership, is always going to happen. We must make the best of it and use it as a lever where appropriate,” he observed. “So, one of my roles now is to help guide the change that’s taking place.” The first task of the present Board, he said, is conducting a search for Richards’ replacement as General Manager.

Knowlton was appointed to the Board in 2014 after former Director Marion Milne died during her term. Since then, he has been elected three times. In his 2021 re-election bid, he presented his goal to clarify and improve the Board’s procedural processes. Part of the purpose of this, he wrote at the time, is to make Board processes and responsibilities more transparent to members newly elected to the Board.

To Knowlton, evolving the board is a key part of his vision for success. He applies that vision to himself, too. “Hopefully, after a number of years, I’ll get to say, ‘well, that was fun, and now it’s time for someone else to carry WEC’s vision forward,’” he noted. “Just as the demographics of Vermont and in WEC territory evolve, the Board must do that too. Board decisions coming from a diverse group of Directors will reflect better the desires of the entire community.” While WEC’s mission to reliably serve its members remains unchanged, Knowlton connects the overall health and adaptability of the Co-op to the culture of the Board. That culture may be defined as identifying and tapping into the varied

Just as the demographics of Vermont and in WEC territory evolve, the Board must do that too. Board decisions coming from a diverse group of Directors will reflect better the desires of the entire community.

— Steve Knowlton

expertise and strengths of WEC members, and encouraging them to run for the Board as part of a regular process of turnover, he explained, under the assumption that the Co-op benefits from all who share the common goal of serving their community and Co-op.

Changing a culture doesn’t happen overnight, Knowlton acknowledged.

It could involve creating auxiliary boards as a way to include more member voices and to prepare future Directors. More immediately, Knowlton hopes to create a systematic way of reaching out to members: by way of town boards and committees, Q&A gatherings, or other direct outreach. “My intent is to reach out to different groups to make sure there’s two way communication between the Board and the WEC membership,” he explained.

Broadband

Along with outgoing president Barry Bernstein, Knowlton has dedicated a significant amount of time and energy to studying the feasibility of broadband rollout during his last term. WEC’s primary essential service is electricity, yet if Co-op members can finally access affordable, high speed internet over the next few years, it will become a defining achievement of their presidencies.

At this point in time, WEC’s partners are organized, funding possibilities are tangible, and a working group is addressing real world complications like rising construction costs. “We will consider ourselves successful if WEC can play its essential role in concert with its partners to strive for universal coverage and universal accessibility to service at a reasonable cost for our members within three to five years,” Knowlton said. “We would focus on building out in the most rural areas, primarily.” That plan aligns with federal funding priorities, and it would need to align with the rollout plans of the Communication Union Districts (CUDs). Some corporate carriers are already laying fiber out from densely populated service areas, but there is no apparent profit motive for them to provide service to the most rural areas, Knowlton said. But as a not for profit guided by cooperative principles, WEC, and its CUD partners, are in a position to provide end of the line service.

Electric service


Over the hundred-plus year history of electricity distribution, the product itself—the way it is generated, sourced, and distributed—has changed dramatically. WEC’s adaptations, driven by member demand, have served



WEC Board President Steve Knowlton and spouse Lindy Biggs posed a few years back with their electric vehicle. Beyond reliable and affordable electric service and broadband rollout, Knowlton sees evolving the culture of leadership development at WEC as a key part of his vision for success.

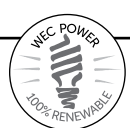
it well, said Knowlton, transitioning the Co-op to 100 percent renewable sources well before the state’s mandate. But, he said, “WEC still needs to be forward looking. We need to do this in the face of uncertainty.” Advancing technology and energy policy, for example, he said, may motivate both small and large-scale storage solutions. Advanced metering equipment and two-way controls in real time could give WEC the ability to implement creative rate structures to further incentivize electric heating and transportation. In order to make informed decisions on behalf of WEC’s members, “as a Board, we need to be looking ahead 20 years to what the utility landscape is going to be like,” while keeping focused on the current needs of the membership, he said.

It takes a certain amount of trust to advocate for a 20 year vision when those who carry out the vision will almost certainly be a few Board cycles removed from those Directors seated today. Knowlton is comfortable with

that. If the Board’s responsibilities and processes are clarified, if Board members are representative, curious, and working in good faith, and if leadership remains guided by WEC’s well established cooperative principles, then WEC is in a healthy position to adapt to and lead change, regardless of who holds the baton at any given time. Broadband is a big deal; so is technological adaptation. However, fostering a system of Board development to sustain WEC’s operations and planning may be Knowlton’s profoundest goal. 

To learn more about Steve Knowlton, read his candidate statement in the April 2021 issue of *Co-op Currents*.

To schedule a meeting with your community group, offer feedback, or inquire about running for the Board of Directors, contact him: 802-223-2230 or knowlsf@auburn.edu



Kresock

continued from page 1

functionality. Once BED's fiber was installed, the utility's awareness and response speed changed completely, he explained: "If an alarm went off, a systems operator would see it pop up on a screen and respond to it in real time."

Problem solving

Kresock's experience supporting Burlington's fiber rollout is important to WEC, with its twin focus on supporting members and improving grid reliability. It also helps that Kresock is motivated by solving problems and helping meet unfulfilled needs. "One of the reasons I was interested in coming to WEC is because they've made the decision to make things better for members by deploying fiber," he explained. "The nice thing about WEC is it's very team-oriented. No one person has

all the answers to any one problem." He's mindful that the requirements of WEC's broadband partners, including communication utility districts (CUDs) and internet service providers, must inform the system design. Logically, he said, it makes sense for WEC to build the infrastructure "backbone," allowing CUDs to come through afterward and connect fiber to members' homes and businesses.

When it comes to WEC's grid, it's always safety first. "Security will be a priority when we start talking about connecting the grid together via fiber," he said. Best practice, Kresock pointed out, is to keep SCADA systems isolated from business communications—and that's something WEC already does.

Then, in order for WEC to improve its operations based on data collected throughout the grid, he said, "WEC just has to do some strategic planning to connect to field devices, substations,

That's very doable; it just takes planning." That, said Patty Richards, is exactly what she's hoping for, and where she's already seen Kresock making strides at WEC. "We want to bring in team oriented people who know how to problem solve," she said, "and Dave has demonstrated years of it."

Stowe & pros

While he's excited about the potential to use fiber rollout to improve both member experience and operations at WEC, Kresock said that overall, he likes what he sees. "I find this industry is filled with professionals who know what they're doing. I don't anticipate making any drastic changes off the bat," he observed.

Kresock is familiar with WEC in part through his work at neighboring Stowe, where his team supported WEC with mutual aid after major storms. The two utilities have a history of working

together: in 2017, the Northeast Public Power Association selected Stowe's bid to help after Hurricane Irma devastated the grid on the island of St. Thomas, and WEC Lineworker Kyle Sands signed up to help out. Then, after some members of the St. Thomas restoration team had shipped out, a major windstorm tangled the lines in Vermont, especially in Stowe, which doesn't usually see the kind of wind damage WEC does. "Stowe got hit pretty hard. That was my first big one like that," remembered Kresock.

Weather and terrain, Kresock said, will likely be his steepest learning curve at WEC. Unlike municipal utilities, WEC's is a large, rural, heavily forested, mostly offroad territory, with power lines vulnerable to symptoms of climate change like windstorms, heavy wet snow, and the spread of invasive species like the Emerald Ash Borer.

But having been on both sides of mutual aid, Kresock thinks Vermont is well organized when it comes to major storm response. "Utilities communicate quite well with each other in the state, which I think is great. It's a unique feature of Vermont compared to other states: they get together and coordinate efforts," he said.

Bringing it home

In conversation, Kresock tends to circle two themes: his curiosity, and the satisfaction he finds in helping a highly functioning team reach its potential. These themes don't just apply to electrical engineering. A gifted baker of pies (bake sale organizers, take note), Kresock described the summer he helped his middle daughter raise money to go on an exchange to Portugal for a year of high school. While his daughter solicited donations of tins and clamshells from local restaurant suppliers, Kresock baked more than 100 pies, made to order. In the end, he said, she had a wonderful year, he learned a lot about pies, and the Kresock family also welcomed several exchange students into their home. It was a powerful experience for their kids, he said: "I think it was just great for them to interact with other cultures."

Exposure to new cultures and concepts is important, but the family orbit is tight. That daughter is now returning to Vermont from Boston (she and her partner work remotely, Kresock pointed out, so for him, the need for high speed internet is personal), and his elder daughter and her family live nearby in Randolph. His son lives at home after just graduating from Vermont Tech. Kresock and his wife have a camp on Crystal Lake in Barton, and he likes nothing more than spending time there fishing with his grandsons.

For now, Kresock is focused on getting to know the Co-op. "Go out and see the system, talk things over with the guys, meet our members and talk to them and hear their needs," he listed. Look for him out in the field or at the next membership meeting, or contact him with operations-related questions, concerns, or accolades at dave.kresock@wec.coop.



Button Up 2021 Incentives for WEC Members

Thermal Incentives

Weatherization



WEC

- Weatherization improvements to building shell: \$600 for Home Performance with Energy Star contractor

Efficiency Vermont

- Receive 50% of project costs back, up to \$1,000.
- WEC member households may be eligible for 50% of project costs, up to \$3,000; see eligibility, here: <https://www.efficiencyvermont.com/rebates/list/home-performance-with-energy-star>

Heat Pump Incentives

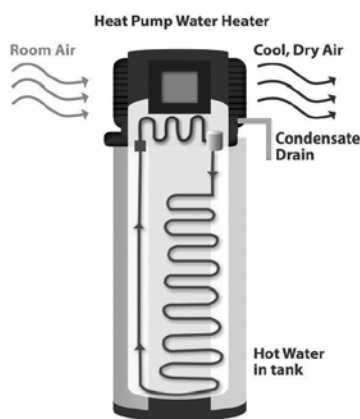
WEC & EVT 2021 Heat Pump (HP) Incentives¹

A qualifying house meets or exceeds minimum thermal standards (VT Residential Energy Code)

	Point of purchase discount ²	WEC bonus incentive ^{3,4}
Ductless - ≤2 tons	\$350	\$250
Ductless - >2 tons	\$450	\$250
Ducted - ≤2 tons	\$1,000	\$250
Ducted - >2-<4 tons	\$1,500	\$250
Ducted - ≥4 tons	\$2,000	\$250

Air to water (A2W) heat pump \$1,000/ton

Ground source heat pump Coming in 2021



- 1 Qualified by Efficiency Vermont
- 2 Point of purchase discount applied; provided by Efficiency Vermont
- 3 HP installed in building meeting/exceeding thermal standards (VT residential energy code)
- 4 Contact WEC for eligibility for bonus incentive

Heat Pump Water Heater (Hybrid) Incentives¹

	Point of purchase discount ²	WEC bonus incentive ⁴
Replacing conventional electric hot water	Up to \$600	-
Replacing fossil-fired hot water system	Up to \$600	\$250

WEC encourages members considering purchase of HPWH to select unit with CTA-2045 communication port, to enable future participation in a Co-op load management program

Pellet Stoves, Furnaces, and Boilers Incentives



WEC

- \$250 for either a qualifying pellet stove or a wood stove. Stoves must be installed by qualified installer.
- Pellet furnace: \$1,000
- Pellet boiler: \$1,000

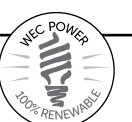
Efficiency Vermont*

- Pellet stove: \$200 when installed by qualified contractor
- Pellet furnace or boiler: up to \$6,000

Note: Incentives of over \$600 or more require a completed W-9 form. See <https://www.washingtonelectric.coop/energy-coach-home/>

*Offers subject to change. See [EfficiencyVermont.com](https://www.efficiencyvermont.com) for current details.

802.224.2329 • energycoach@wec.coop



Members Write

At Work In High Places

Making Way For Broadband

Photos, captions, and essay by John Lyman

Over the hills and through the valleys of Central Vermont a broadband rollout is underway. The enduring and ubiquitous utility pole, first used by The Great Western Railway in 1843 to support telegraph lines, is now piggy-backing mile after mile of fiber optic cable in addition to transmission lines. Above the landscape, against the sky, the bold silhouette of broadband now appears in many rural locations. Residents in out of the way places will eventually have full service opportunities. That is the objective. To ensure that access is available to all. The internet is so integral to modern life that a resolution passed by The United Nations in 2016 declares access a human right.

A build-out of this magnitude

parallels The Rural Electrification Act of 1936. Just one example from a list of technological achievements over the last 200 years that, due to scope and expense, required the interplay of federal, state, and private industry know-how, resources, and skills. Ostensibly to improve living conditions for people everywhere. The recently formed Vermont Community Broadband Authority will likely use funds from the American Rescue Plan to coordinate, facilitate and accelerate the broadband build-out throughout Vermont. Broadband offers the prospects of higher speeds, greater capacity, and enhanced reliability. Making such a package widely available across the state has been long in coming. The benefits and pitfalls of internet usage are abundantly clear to most users. To the good, it enables one to interact with the world in the 21st

century. Regardless of where one's interest rises or falls, the internet is highly efficient at connecting your query with relevant information. It is practically a stand alone resource for purposes of education, business, commerce, culture, art, social media, correspondence, entertainment, news, weather, ad infinitum. In short, given the complexities of today's world, a connection to the internet can be a valuable aid to any coping strategy, or an inquiring mind. In a pandemic year, who with access is choosing not to use it. Surely there are concerns with free speech, user privacy, and data security. These are ongoing issues that regularly deserve and receive attention. The discerning consumer remains vigilant as to whom earns trust and what is credible.

Spring poked a few holes in the March weather that brought unusual

activity onto Willey Hill Road in East Topsham. At first, gatherings of supervisors and foremen were craning to view the right-of-way. Then Matt Foster and his crew cleared out some brush and timber. WEC crews and equipment arrived with new poles in tow which they proceeded to prepare and erect. Sporadic visits from Topsham Telephone were evident. On March 24, a WEC line crew consented to some photography as they elevated existing transmission lines to create a communications corridor for broadband. Days later, Vance Line Construction out of Danville began the roll-out and installation of fiber optic cable which I now see from my kitchen window. The sight gives me hope. Moisture in buried lines has disrupted service in the past. Possibly a more satisfactory connection is not far off. 🙌



WEC lineworkers lift power lines to accommodate broadband rollout.



Working remotely has some people right at home.



Specialized equipment supports WEC line crews when and where possible. Remote placements and stormy conditions pose a greater challenge.



'I have hold of this if you would like to...' WEC lineworkers hover over Willey Hill Road after elevating power lines.

