

VERMONT

ELECTRIC



## CEO Update: Vermont Electric Co-op – for Energy and Community

By Rebecca Towne

For all of our members, VEC is here to keep the lights on, safely, affordably, and reliably. That's our core mission, for sure. And because we are a cooperative-owned by you, our members – we're more than just an energy provider. We're proudly invested in the local community.

One example? We're currently supporting broadband "make-ready" efforts, preparing our system so broadband providers can safely attach equipment to VEC poles to help accelerate the penetration of good quality internet – for education, for health care, for jobs – into the reaches of VEC's rural territory. In the past 12 months we have prepared 150 miles for broadband fiber, and expect much more in the coming years as we work with local Communication Union Districts and broadband providers to plan ahead.

We are investing in resilience, too. We're launch-

ing a Flexible Load Home Battery Program because we want to support members' efforts to increase their household resilience. The effort will also benefit all co-op members because it will help us reduce our peak load, which lowers costs. We're really proud that, after a lot of planning and analysis, we're able to expand resilience and peak load strategies right to members' homes and businesses. (Read more in the story below).

Another component of community connection is a strong and responsive local presence. We recently invested in a new facility in Newport, on Citizens Road, which remains a key nerve center for the eastern end of our service territory. The building provides a more productive workspace for our field crews, and we designed an efficient high-performance building, complete with an EV charging station. (Stop by if you need to plug in!)

And, of course, we can't talk about our community without mentioning VEC's growing Community Fund! Supported entirely by voluntary donations

from VEC members, the fund supports local organizations that promote community development and economic security, and embodies the key cooperative principle of "concern for community." Offering support for electric boat rides to families dealing with cancer, new books for preschools, and grants for addiction recovery services, the fund has delivered welcome financial support to many organizations that make our communities great places to live. (See how you can support the fund, and how organizations can apply for funding, in our story on page 7.)

If you haven't done so recently, we invite you to explore our website, [vermontelectric.coop](http://vermontelectric.coop). You'll see a lot of specifics – but you might also be struck by the big ideas: energy innovation, economic development, convenience, energy for the future, and, importantly, community. Thank you for being a part of it. And, as always, if you have any comments or questions, please be in touch.

# Flexible Load Home Battery Program: Launching Next Month

VEC will be launching a home battery incentive program in September.

Under the program, VEC will be offering an incentive to members who are willing to allow VEC to use the members' home battery a limited number of times per year when we are anticipating peak demand. Members will receive a monthly bill credit, or they can opt for an upfront payment and lower monthly bill credit.

Incentive amounts will be:

- Monthly bill credit of \$6.40 per kilowatt (kW), OR
- Upfront payment of \$268 per kW and monthly bill credit of \$3.20 per kW

For example, a member with a 5-kW battery would have the following options. One would be a \$32/month bill credit. The second would be an upfront payment of \$1,340 and a \$16/month bill credit.

Battery brands eligible for the program at this time include Generac PWRcell, Tesla Powerwall and Sonnen. Other batteries may be added in the future. If members are interested in purchasing a battery currently eligible for the program, they can visit the manufacturer specific websites or Renewable Energy Vermont's member directory and search for businesses that offer residential storage services in their area.

VEC will make every effort to avoid drawing down batteries before a major weather event that could cause outages, and in no case will VEC draw the battery down below 20 percent of its capacity, unless the member sets a deeper or complete discharge.



**VEC is launching a home battery storage program in which the co-op will offer an incentive to members if they allow VEC to use their battery periodically.**

"This program is one more way that members who are interested can participate in the evolution of the grid," said Rebecca Towne, VEC's CEO. "Home battery systems can increase members' resilience, and if they are willing to share the energy in the bat-

tery with VEC when they are not using it, it can help the co-op as a whole save money," she said.

You can find out more on VEC's website here: <https://vermontelectric.coop/flexible-load>



# From Nest Down to a Family Reunion

For weeks earlier this summer, VEC member Jenn Fenn of Alburgh and her three-year-old son Merlin – who travel route 78 back and forth from Alburgh to W. Swanton every day – had been watching a family of osprey nesting on a platform, set up by VEC, on the Swanton side of the Alburgh-Swanton bridge. One day, they noticed that the nest had fallen off its pole. Their keen eyes and initiative led to a 24-hour scramble to save some baby ospreys.



## Wednesday, July 14

**9AM** Jenn Fenn and her son Merlin are driving from Alburgh to Swanton. They notice the osprey nest that they pass every day for weeks was no longer on the top of its pole.

**4PM** Jenn and Merlin, returning from Swanton, see an adult osprey sitting on top of the bare pole. They park the car and walk over to the base of the pole to find the nest holding three weak and limp osprey nestling on the ground. Jenn contacts a wildlife rehabilitation team. The nestling are brought to a rehabilitation center in Westford. Two recover quickly with hydration and food; the third is more severely injured. (See photos at left)

**7:30 PM** Because she knows the pole and nest platform have been set up by VEC, Carol Winfield, a member of the rehabilitation team, calls the VEC control center off hours and speaks with System Operator Brian Sylvester. Brian contacts Operations Supervisor Isaac Gillen and they arrange to have a VEC crew at the site the following morning to put up a new platform and replace the nest so the birds could be put back in the nest. Time is of the essence because osprey parents may abandon nests that are destroyed.



## Thursday, July 15

**9AM** VEC crews install a new platform atop the pole, lift the remains of the fallen nest on the new platform, and reconstruct the nest.

**11:30 AM** Carol Winfield and her daughter Clara, along with two of the nestlings, meet Jenn Fenn and VEC crews at the pole site. Accompanied by a VEC lineworker, Clara goes up in the bucket and puts the two nestlings back in the nest, with the third one still being rehabilitated but doing well.

**11:40 AM** Parent osprey flies to the nest and finds the babies.

*What about the third bird? At press time, it appeared that the third nestling that fell was doing well, despite more serious injuries. He was expected to be released.*



## Comments

**Carol Winfield, wildlife rehabilitator:**

When I called VEC, I told them that if we can get that nest up by the next morning, there would be a chance the parents could continue to care for the fledglings. VEC really rallied. They were fantastic – got a new platform up and rebuilt the nest, and even added a stick for a perch off the nest. And if (Jenn Fenn) had not been sharp enough to notice the nest was down, those babies would be dead. When a nest comes down, parent ospreys will stay around, searching for their babies. Sometimes they will leave within a day or so, but sometimes they will persist longer. The concern was that the parents might give up. So, the quicker you do it the better. Just a couple minutes after the babies were put back in the nest and the VEC cherry picker dropped down, the mamma was back at the nest. From start to finish the whole process was less than 18 hours! Wild parents do love their babies! And, the third baby osprey is doing very well, eating over a half pound of fish, mice, and meat a day! His injured eye is much better, and broken foot is healing well, with care four times a day. We are very hopeful he will recover fully and be released.

**Jenn Fenn, VEC member who discovered the fallen nest:**

My kids are serious bird enthusiasts, so when we travel to and from day care, we keep an eye on the osprey. That Wednesday, when we passed by, we said "Oh no the nest is down" and we found the nestlings, and we called the rehabilitation team. The next day, I watched them put the nestlings back in the nest, and then watched the mother come back to the nest - cuddling with her babies again! As we drive by, we're keeping an eye on them – it makes me incredibly happy. I'm so thankful to VEC for their help in getting these fledglings back in their nest!"

## VEC and Osprey in the Islands

For the safety and well-being of both osprey and VEC electrical equipment, VEC has erected osprey poles and platforms in locations approved by the US Fish and Wildlife Service – at six spots throughout the Champlain Islands in order to encourage the birds to nest away from VEC electrical equipment. The platforms are made from the circular ends of wooden spools of transmission wire. Because these nesting platforms should not be made of pressure treated wood, over time they can deteriorate. VEC is now inspecting the platforms annually during the months the osprey have migrated out of the region. After years of decline, osprey populations have strongly recovered, due in part to the efforts of power companies and other organizations erecting nest platforms, and the reduction of use of poisonous pesticides and herbicides.



# VEC is Looking to the Future, as Crews Move to Electric Equipment

Along with many of our members, VEC is taking steps to electrify certain elements of our work.

Over the past couple of years, VEC has purchased a hybrid electric car (a Ford Fusion) as a fleet vehicle, an electric forklift for use in our Newport facility, and a fleet of electric chainsaws for our line crews.

"We want to be learning all the time and we believe that putting these devices to the practical test, on the ground right here in our territory, will benefit both VEC crews and our members," said Rebecca Towne, VEC's chief executive officer.

There can be significant benefits to electric technologies, including lower lifetime costs, lower emissions, and less noise, Towne noted. She added that as VEC's energy supply gets cleaner, moving from fossil fuel powered tools and vehicles to electric powered equipment – where it makes sense – will result in more climate-friendly energy use overall.

"We have been pleased with these tools and are looking to purchase additional electric vehicles and equipment in the coming years as it makes sense," Towne said. "We are particularly excited that electric trucks will be coming soon and we are ready to put those into action at VEC."

David Young, a safety technician who has experience with VEC's electric chainsaws and other field equipment, says the tools are light, easy to charge, and less noisy than gas-powered saws. "For the right job, they are a very good tool," he said. "One example: when crews are using gasoline powered saws to cut high limbs, they have to start the saw on the ground, let it warm up, turn it off before they get raised in the bucket. Once they are raised to height, they then have to start the saw again in the bucket, which is less than ideal and that's a lot of starting and stopping. With the electric saw they go right up in the bucket and start cutting."

Young noted that VEC crews use a range of smaller electric tools – drills, crimpers and more – and he noted among the benefits can be ergonomic benefits.



VEC has a plug-in hybrid electric Ford Fusion that is used as a fleet vehicle at a recent annual meeting.



VEC Safety Technician David Young, left, holds an electric sickle bar brush cutter. At right is Substation Technician Dan Hinton with an electric chainsaw. When VEC crews operate this type of equipment they wear full personal protective equipment and we encourage our members to do the same.

## Do You Use Electric Equipment?

VEC members who purchase certain types of smaller-scale electric/battery-powered equipment can now be entered into a monthly drawing to win a \$100 bill credit.

VEC's ChargeItUp program is a way for VEC members who buy electric tools such as yard care equipment and other devices traditionally powered by fossil fuels to get a chance to win, and at the same time share their experience with the equipment.

Whether it's a weed whacker, a hedge trimmer or a chainsaw, or even other types of equipment, electric devices are generally cleaner, more climate-friendly, cheaper to run, and more convenient than their gasoline-powered counterparts. And, because battery technology has improved, on-the-ground performance is very good.

Check out the details and enter your device here: <https://vermont-electric.coop/chargeitup-program>



Newport District Operations Supervisor Chris Lawson demonstrates an electric forklift at VEC's Newport facility.

## New Electric Forklift Does the Job in Newport

Chris Lawson, operations supervisor in the Newport District, said he expects the new electric forklift recently purchased for the Newport facility will be easy to use and very efficient.

"The reasons we got it? It's contained, gets in between the shelving easily, it's got good lifting capacity, and reduces emissions in the building," he said.

Demonstrating the safety features and the high-reaching lift capacity, which allows the stacking of heavy-but-only-occasionally-needed supplies in the upper shelving in the building, Lawson noted the ease of the forklift's "refueling."

"It's got a self-contained battery, never needs any service," he said. "Pretty simple – end of the day or when it's down to 20 percent, you run it over to a 120 outlet. You plug it into the wall, eight hours later it's fully charged and ready to go. So, plug it in at night and the next morning you'll be fully up and running."



# A Good Time for Co-op Community Solar?



Would you like to save money on your electric bills and support a cleaner energy future? Maybe it's time to check out VEC's Co-op Community Solar.

With Co-op Community Solar you make an upfront payment to sponsor panels in existing solar arrays and then receive a fixed, guaranteed monthly bill credit for either 10 or 20 years. In the end, the bill credits total more than the upfront payment.

The program is:

- Customizable – you can sponsor as many panels as you need.
- Flexible – you can add panels any time, or even leave the program and get a partial refund.
- COVID-Safe – you can set up your sponsorship entirely remotely, via phone and email. Enrollment involves no on-site installations or in-person meetings.

Candice Campbell of Derby sponsored panels several years ago and says she's glad she did.

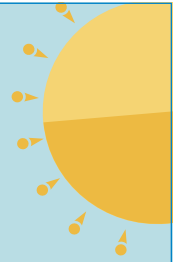
"This program takes the burden off the homeowner for maintenance, which is great. I really commend VEC for developing a program where people can participate in solar so easily," Campbell said.

Another VEC member, Alejandra Barrenechea of Williston, is also happy with her decision to sponsor panels in the program.

"By sponsoring panels in VEC arrays, I didn't have to worry about maintenance, or cutting trees on my own property, and I could still reduce my carbon footprint," she said. "It was the best of both worlds. I don't think there is any negative to this program and I'd highly recommend it to other VEC members."

Find out more here: <https://vermontelectric.coop/co-op-community-solar>, or call Member Services at 1-800-832-2667.

## Solar Power For People, Not Profit.



Vermont Electric Cooperative is member-owned and committed to the best interests of our members and their communities. This is why we developed VEC Co-op Community Solar—an easy and efficient way for all VEC members to get great value while supporting clean electricity.

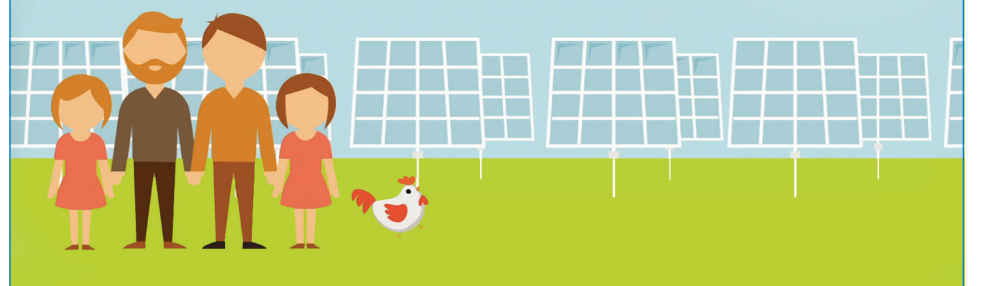
VEC Co-op Community Solar is perfect for folks renting their home and for houses with a shady site or unsuitable roof.

Members simply make a one-time upfront payment (starting at just \$100) to sponsor a portion of the solar array and receive a guaranteed fixed monthly credit on their electric bill.

Participants can opt out at any time for any reason, and get back a prorated portion of their sponsorship. Ten and twenty year terms are available and so is affordable financing.

With projects up and running in Alburgh, Grand Isle and Hinesburg, now is a good time to support solar with VEC Co-op Community Solar.

**For more information, visit [vermontelectric.coop/solar](https://vermontelectric.coop/solar) or call 1-800-832-2667.**



Headquartered in Johnson, Vermont Electric Cooperative serves 32,000 members, 2,882 miles of distribution line, 2,056 square miles of territory, and 75 communities in eight counties.

## VEC to Return Member Capital This Fall

This fall VEC will be returning \$1.6 million in member capital to members. This will be the ninth consecutive year that VEC members have received a member capital distribution.

"Once again, we are proud to put money back into our members' pockets," said Michael Bursell, VEC's chief financial officer. "Our members are our community – and the community, after all, built the co-op."

VEC allocates any money that's left after paying its operating expenses to its members. This "member capital" is kept in reserve and used to help the co-op

secure good borrowing rates and invest in infrastructure, which allows the co-op to provide safe, reliable power to its members and maintain stability over time. Annually, the VEC Board of Directors determines whether the co-op is in a strong enough financial position to return portions of member capital to members. This year's distribution will take the form of a September bill credit for eligible members who paid electric charges in 1997 and/or 2020. For more information about member capital, visit VEC's website at <https://vermontelectric.coop/member-capital> or call 1-800-832-2667.



That's how one VEC member recently described our online portal SmartHub. SmartHub allows you to track your usage by hour, get bill notifications, schedule payments, and even pay your bill with just a few mouse clicks.

"We love SmartHub," said Patty Titus of Hinesburg, another VEC member who uses the tool. "It lets us see our usage so we can make changes in how we use electricity so we can lower our bills," she said. "It's also easy to pay your bill through the portal, and we love the outage feature too."

You can get access to SmartHub on the homepage of VEC's website by clicking on the SmartHub button. If you were already enrolled in eBill, our previous online payment service, simply enter the same e-mail and password that you've always used. If you are a new user, click on the new user option on the SmartHub homepage. To create an account, you will need your account number, the last name of the first person listed on the account (or business name), and e-mail address. If you have questions or need help signing up, please call VEC's Member Services Department at 1-800-832-2667.

## Convenience! 100 percent

Here are some comments about SmartHub from other members that we recently received on Facebook:

**"I love it. So easy to do anything I need to. Pay bills, look at my usage, report an outage, and more!"**

**"Use it for outages, bill payment and historical comparison around usage."  
"So easy to pay your bill and look at your usage!"**

## Do You Have Past Due Utility Bills?

If you or someone you know has suffered economic hardship due to COVID-19 and has past due utility bills, financial assistance may be available.

**Renters:** call 833-488-3727  
or visit [vtutilityhelp.com](http://vtutilityhelp.com)

**Home/Business Owners:** call 833-295-8988  
or visit [publicservice.vermont.gov](http://publicservice.vermont.gov)  
and click on the "Utility Bill Help" tab  
in center of page

*Funds are limited so act soon!*



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## Have You Changed Your Phone Number Recently, or Moved to Cell Phone Only?

From time to time, VEC has to utilize planned outages in order to repair or upgrade our system. When we do that, we send an automated phone call and email to affected members alerting them to the start time and expected duration of the interruption. In an effort to continue to improve our communications, we are requesting that members email us, at their convenience, the best telephone number(s) for this purpose.

Please email [support@vermontelectric.coop](mailto:support@vermontelectric.coop).

*You can also update the information by logging into your SmartHub account either on the web or through the app. Thank you!*

## Paperless Delivery Now Available for Co-op Life

In an effort to accommodate the changing reading preferences of our membership, we are now offering members the opportunity to opt out of receiving a hard copy of Co-op Life mailed to their homes or businesses. Instead, we will send those members a simple email with a quick summary of Co-op Life stories and links to the online version.

Co-op Life is our time honored, flagship publication that for years we have mailed directly to all of our members. We remain committed to delivering it to our many members who want a hard-copy publication to hold in their hands. At the same time, we want to accommodate members who prefer to get information digitally, so we are offering that option for those who would like it.

If you would like to receive a link to the online version rather than a hard copy of Co-op Life, please visit <https://vermontelectric.coop/forms/paperless-co-op-life> and fill out our online form.



# VEC's 2021 Annual Meeting – a Recap

Grid innovations, reliability, a new commitment to cleaner power, and accelerated broadband deployment were all front-and-center topics at Vermont Electric Co-op's virtual Annual Meeting back in May.

The meeting, entitled "An Adaptable Resilient Grid: Teaming up for a Bright Future," was presided over by VEC Board President Rich Goggin of South Hero and featured a presentation from VEC Chief Executive Officer Rebecca Towne, a guest appearance from Lt. Gov. Molly Gray, participant questions, and more.

During the meeting VEC also announced the winners of this year's Board of Directors elections. There were three seats up for election: district 2, East Zone At-Large, and West Zone At-Large. The winner in District 2 was John Ward; the winner in West Zone At-Large was Bonnie Pratt; and the winner in East Zone At-Large was Tom Bailey. You can find details about the results including vote tallies here (<https://vermontelectric.coop/annual-meeting>)

Broad and consistent themes in Towne's remarks included VEC's innovations and continued efforts to lay the groundwork for a resilient and modern energy system in VEC's rural territory.

"We are very focused on serving your energy needs in an affordable reliable way and making sure we are a part of thriving rural communities," Towne told members who logged on to the meeting.



**During VEC's 2021 Annual Meeting, Chief Executive Officer Rebecca Towne talked about innovation and battery storage initiatives underway at the co-op.**

Towne noted that the co-op has saved about \$50,000 by using a new utility-scale battery in Hinesburg to store energy when costs are low and then using that power when costs are high. She noted that the co-op will be launching other battery storage programs soon that will help keep costs down for the co-op, increase resilience,

and over time allow more renewable energy to be integrated into the system.

Towne also highlighted VEC's new initiative to support broadband deployment by making co-op infrastructure ready for broadband deployment. She also highlighted the co-op's recent commitment to procuring cleaner power in the coming years, saying it's a way VEC can do its part to address climate change.

"As an energy provider we have an important role to play in mitigating the human impact of climate change," she said.

Towne also noted that 2,000 members have taken advantage of VEC's Energy Transformation program, which offers incentives to members who buy certain equipment, like electric vehicles, heat pumps, and yard equipment for example. As more members take advantage of this program, she said, VEC's power supply will provide an increasingly cleaner source of energy for these devices.

Other items Towne highlighted included:

- Reliability continues to improve.

The co-op is increasing tree trimming and continues to move poles to the roadside where practical.

- VEC saw 390 new service applications in 2020, a record for recent years.
- VEC has made it easier than ever for members to give to the Community Fund by rounding up their bills, donating patronage capital, or making a one-time donation.

Lt. Gov Gray, in her remarks at the meeting, offered a statewide perspective on several issues, including legislative matters and COVID relief funding. Saying broadband is going to be "the electricity of our time," she stressed that getting broadband deployed as fast as possible to areas in need is critical. She also noted that keeping young people in Vermont through investments in areas like child care and workforce development is a priority for her. She also said that while it's commendable that Vermont has had strong vaccine deployment so far, it needs to continue. "My plea to Vermonters is to come together so we can get that community immunity so that we can get our fairs, and parades and barbecues going again," she said.

## Board Members Elected at 2021 Annual Meeting



**John Ward**  
District 2



**Bonnie Pratt**  
West Zone



**Tom Bailey**  
East Zone

## Having Fun in Our Communities This Summer!

VEC has been out at a couple of farmers markets this summer, connecting with members and enjoying all that Vermont has to offer this time of year. For instance, we spent a beautiful day at the Craftsbury Farmers Market and Blueberry Festival a couple of weeks ago meeting with members and discussing our service, incentives, our new home battery storage program, our broadband make ready program and a lot more. At right are a few pictures from the day.





# Help Us Grow the Community Fund!

With your help, we can boost the giving power of the VEC Community Fund this year. Now it's as easy as ever to participate. With just a few mouse clicks, you can sign up to donate any amount one-time, round up your electric bill or donate your Member Capital.

(If you already participate, thank you!)

Supported solely by voluntary donations from members, the Community Fund helps non-profit initiatives right here in the VEC region – supporting food security, rural ambulance service, early childhood education, and a whole lot more.

Since the fund's first award in 2015, more than 50 local non-profits have benefited. We can keep that list growing, with your help! Please consider joining the nearly 1,000 generous VEC members already supporting the fund - so we can do even more!

Organizations interested in being considered for a grant should complete and submit an on-line application at <https://vermontelectric.coop/community-fund>

To be eligible, applicants must be nonprofit tax-exempt organizations and/or public schools. Individuals are not eligible, but funds may pass through eligible organizations to support individual needs. Focus areas of the fund are economic security, energy education, emergency/disaster relief, and community development.

The Community Fund Allocation Committee accepts applications on a rolling basis. The committee reviews applications and makes allocations quarterly. Application windows for each quarter close on the following dates: December 31, March 31, June 30, and September 30.

Learn more at: <https://vermontelectric.coop/community-fund>



A young gardener at the Hinesburg Community Resource Center. The Center was a recent Community Fund grant recipient. Courtesy photo

## What has the Community Fund supported recently?

### Jenna's Promise

- to help upgrade the kitchen at Jenna's House
- a center point for the community in Johnson
- to better host community events, offer cooking classes to the community, and to aid people in their recovery journey.



### The Lunchbox

- to purchase more to-go containers for the curbside food drop-off efforts required because of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as develop new meal routes. The Lunchbox – which takes the form of a simple, white food truck
- provides free summer meals for kids 18 and under.



### Floating Grace

- to support free cruises on Lake Memphremagog for families dealing with cancer.

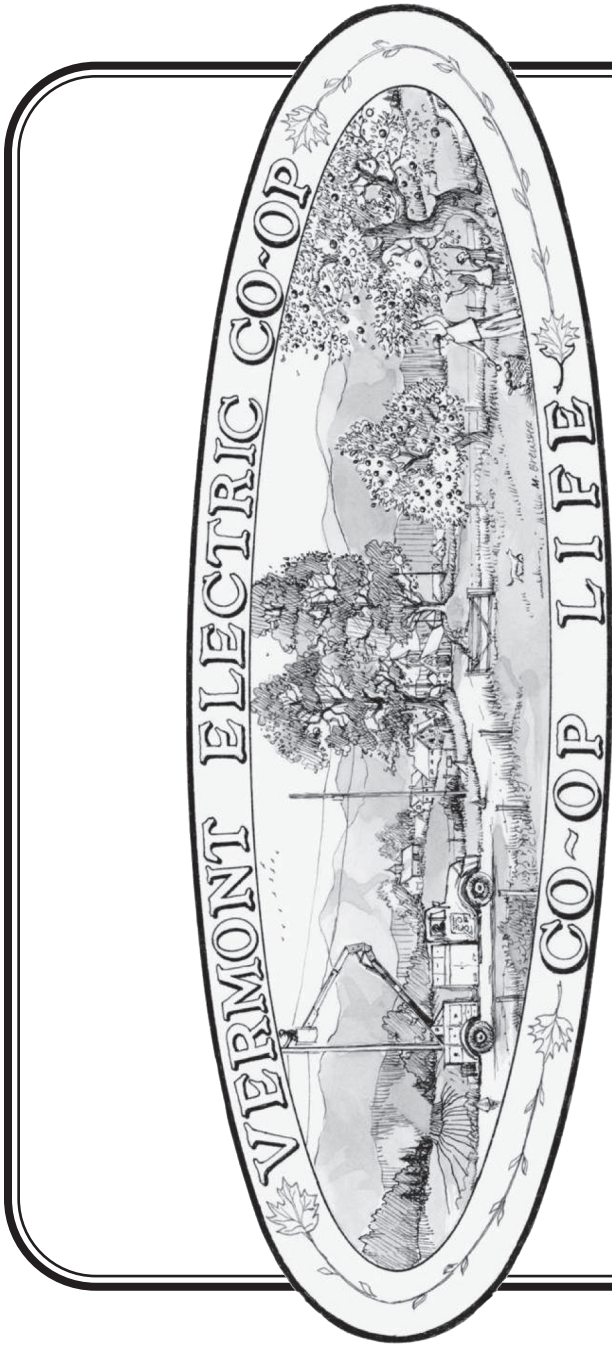


### Alburgh Volunteer Fire Department

- to support cellular boosters for its ambulances to more efficiently send vital patient information to emergency rooms.







Summer 2021

Volume 78 Number 3



These osprey nestlings, born in mid-July, had the adventure of their lives over an 18 hour period last month. Read about it on page 2.



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