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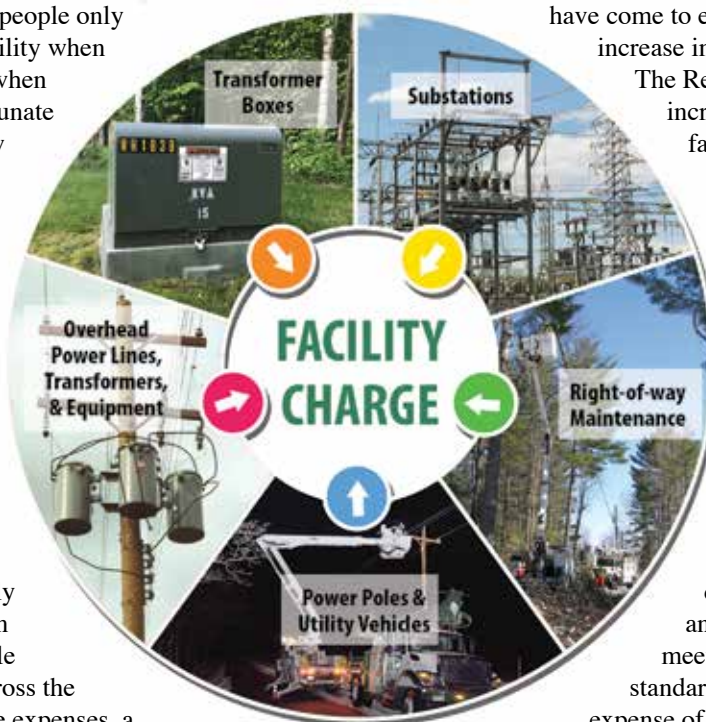
FACILITY CHARGE:

AN INVESTMENT IN RELIABILITY AND SERVICE

by Craig Buross, CEO & General Manager

There is an old saying, that people only care about their electric utility when they receive their bill, or when their power goes out. We are fortunate to have members who notice how much more we do than just distribute electricity. We do our best to provide our members safe, reliable, and affordable electricity but also strive to be stewards for the communities we serve.

The last few years have been anything but easy as inflation continues to affect every sector, and the energy industry is no exception. Over the years, materials and operational expenses have steadily risen. Despite the fact that Vernon Electric remains in the top quartile amongst electric cooperatives across the nation on having low controllable expenses, a slight increase in rates is needed in 2024 to help our not-for-profit cooperative maintain a strong financial position and continue to provide the reliable service our members



have come to expect. Members will see an increase in the monthly facility charge. The Residential facility charge will increase \$1. The Three-Phase facility charge will increase \$2 and the Peak Alert facility charge \$5.

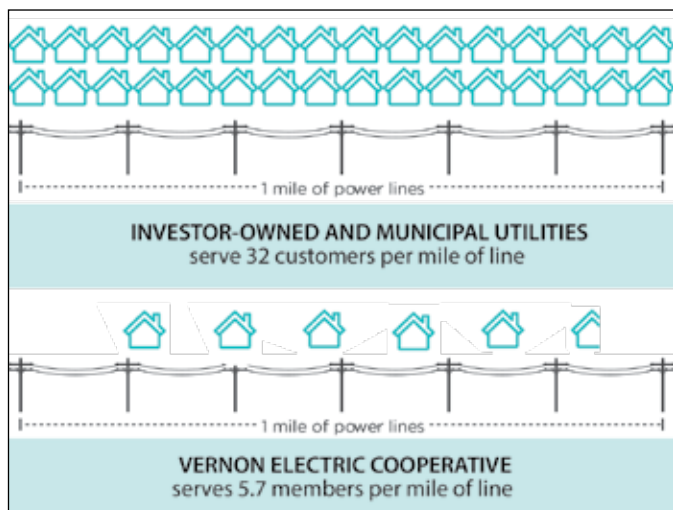
Increases in the facility charge are a measured response to counteract inflating costs and ensure the continued delivery of uninterrupted, reliable electricity to our community.

The infrastructure that delivers power to our homes and businesses demands constant maintenance and occasional upgrades to meet evolving technological standards and safety regulations. The expense of obtaining and maintaining this sophisticated equipment has notably increased, prompting us to reassess our fee structure to accommodate these essential expenses.

It's crucial to recognize the pivotal role facility upgrades and maintenance play in sustaining the reliability and safety of our infrastructure. Investing in these improvements ensures our community receives consistent, high-quality electrical services. Upgrading facilities isn't merely about meeting the current demand; it's about fortifying our infrastructure to withstand future challenges and technological advancements. This foresight is crucial for adapting to new energy-efficient technologies and integrating renewable energy sources into our grid, paving the way for a sustainable future.

Members of the cooperative can rest assured that this nominal increase is a proactive step to ensure continued service excellence and reliability. It enables us to meet the ever-evolving demands of a growing community while maintaining a robust and modernized electrical grid.

Moreover, this rate adjustment aligns with the cooperative principles of democratic member control and financial



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CLEARING CLUTTER WITH *Compassion*

By Leah Call

If organizing your home is a priority in the new year, Vernon Electric Cooperative member Sara Washburn can help. Her professional organizing business Peace by Piece, headquartered near Stoddard, is committed to enhancing the quality of life and well-being of others by freeing them from the chaos of clutter.

Washburn and her assistant Lisa Thibodeau handle an array of situations, each one unique. Their clients include individuals looking to downsize or convert a space to accommodate an injury or physical limitation. The decluttering duo also help empty nesters wanting to repurpose their adult children's bedrooms, and individuals whose hoarding has become a safety concern.

"It sometimes takes someone like us, who is not a family member, to really get the ball rolling," said Washburn. "We do it with compassion, patience and kindness, and we share ideas about keeping people safe in their homes and how to be efficient with storage."

The Path to Order

Washburn is an Army veteran who has worked in service-related jobs throughout her lifetime. She started Peace by Piece in fall 2022, after helping her mother prepare for a rummage sale following her stepfather's death. "Just the hallway closet took three hours," she recalled. "I recognized

so many emotions coming out of my Mom. It was really hard for her. It got me thinking, if I have the patience to do this with my Mom, I can help others do it, too."

Going through a lifetime of belongings is an emotional process. Those ready to take the purging plunge can call, text, or email Peace by Piece to set up an initial one-hour strategy session.

"People have to be ready to make that phone call to us," Washburn added. "They have to be almost fed up with their situation, or maybe a family member is encouraging them, or a loved one has passed away and they need an estate cleanout."

After the initial strategy session, Washburn and Thibodeau go into the client's home and help them determine what to



Sara Washburn, right, with her assistant, Lisa Thibodeau.



Rehoming objects is part of Peace by Piece's services. Here, Washburn prepares to take items out to be donated.

keep, what to donate or sell, and what to throw away. The in-home sessions can last two to five hours. It may take multiple sessions to finish the job.

Recycling and rehoming is part of the service provided by Peace by Piece. They haul away trash and distribute donated items to various area non-profits.

Beyond hands-on decluttering, Peace by Piece offers group and individual coaching and planning services focused on creating and maintaining an organized space. Those sessions

help clients determine where to start and what updates or repairs might be needed to transform the space into their desired purpose or vision.

Determining the end goal for a space is step one in the decluttering plan of attack. "We figure out a plan for the space that is challenging them and help them set it up the way they want it," explained Washburn.

Organizing Tips

Washburn shares these simple tips for creating and maintaining a clutter-free space.

- Start by removing trash
- Sort items into piles: keep, donate or discard
- Utilize a planner, whether paper or digital
- Dedicate time daily for small tasks like loading the dishwasher, folding clothes, and sorting mail
- Schedule a day to implement efforts that help you stay organized, such as setting up a filing system or transitioning to e-statements
- Establish an errand day dedicated to dropping off donations, recycling and rehoming
- Regularly ask yourself – "Do I really need this?"

If tackling an organizing project solo is too overwhelming, help is just a phone call away. "We understand it is hard," said Washburn. "We are here to help. Let's do this together."



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responsibility. As a member-owned entity, the cooperative operates with the best interests of its members at heart. Transparent communication about rate adjustments and financial management is essential to fulfilling these cooperative principles.

In essence, the \$1 increase in the residential facility charge will result in a 0.7% increase to the average member's bill. It is a strategic measure aimed at sustaining the integrity and dependability of our electrical infrastructure in the face of economic challenges. It is an investment in our community's future, ensuring that we remain equipped to deliver safe, reliable, and affordable electrical services.

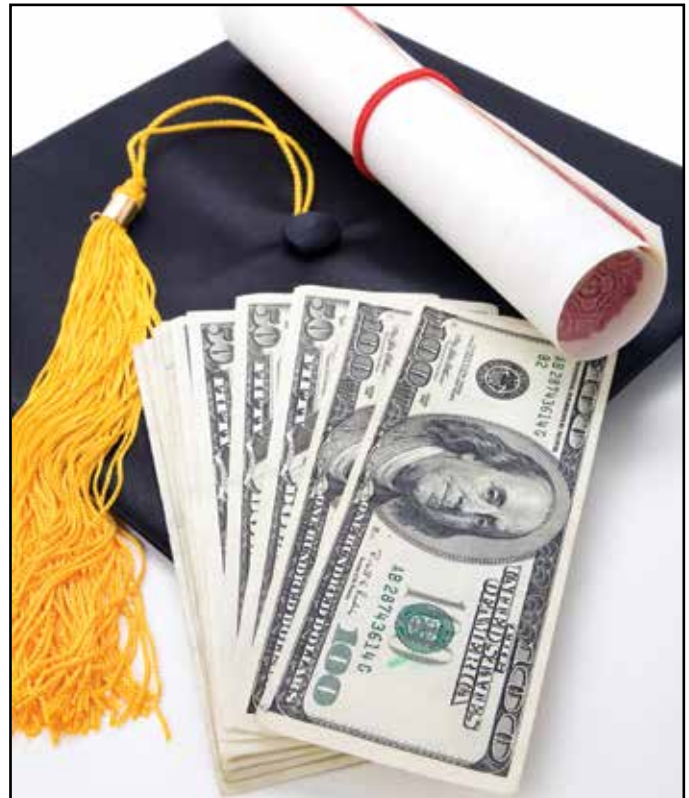
Vernon Electric Cooperative remains committed to fostering an open dialogue with its members. We welcome any questions or concerns regarding this rate adjustment. In conclusion, while any rate adjustment may cause initial concern, it is vital to understand the reasoning behind such decisions.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

During winter months, ensure your home is well sealed to reduce the need for excessive heating. Seal air leaks around your home and add insulation where needed to save up to 10% on annual energy bills.

Install weather stripping on exterior doors and apply caulk around windows. Check attic insulation levels and hire a qualified contractor if additional insulation is required.

Source: energystar.gov



SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE FROM VEC

Scholarships are available to students who are dependents of Vernon Electric Cooperative members. High school seniors selected will each receive a \$750 scholarship for the college or university they decide to attend. Funding for the scholarships comes from unclaimed capital credit checks, which are entrusted to the Federated Youth Foundation. **A Non-Traditional and Line Worker scholarship will also be offered.**

Scholarship applications are available on www.vernonelectric.org/scholarships-applications, by calling our office, or through school counselors.

APPLY BY JANUARY 17, 2024

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