

Virginia's Division of Energy: "Small Staff, Great Work"

Question: What do you get when you put together a former association executive who is a NASCAR fanatic, a master mechanic with an MBA, a "damn Yankee," an immigrant from Lebanon, a former university energy manager, a long-term solar booster, a former electric utility purchasing expert, a VISTA volunteer who later became a licensed high school track meet judge, and a veteran passenger on Air Force One?

Answer: The "state energy office with a small staff doing great work -- Virginia."



The Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy's (DMME) Energy Division core staff impress not as much for their varied backgrounds and interests, but moreso because of their dedication to energy efficiency and the breadth of initiatives underway under their combined leadership.

Recent landmark Virginia legislative mandates, resulting in de facto decoupling and a hybrid form of utility re-regulation, have raised the bar for what they must do to support energy efficiency and to assist customers. The VA legislature also recently enacted a law that authorizes local jurisdictions to operate energy efficiency loan programs. Governor Tim Kaine personally participated in the creation of VA's current comprehensive ten year Energy Plan, which calls for a 40% reduction in the growth of energy use by emphasizing conservation and clean fuel technologies. State agencies now must do much more to reduce energy consumption and costs. Combine all these state and local initiatives with federal Recovery Act funding, and you begin to understand the wide spectrum of programs managed by the lean Division.

Tommy Thompson, five years with the Division, utilizes his unique background -- a degree in mechanical engineering, work on an energy trading floor, experience as a master mechanic, and an MBA -- to manage energy efficiency and purchasing efforts of state agencies. Just the performance contracting work alone will top \$230 M in value this year.

Bob Parolisi, program manager, honchos an effort to procure all of the state government's natural gas needs through long term and cost effective contracts. His previous experience with Dominion Resources (formerly VA Power) and with the Division of Purchases and Supply (DPS) in the VA Department of General Services (DGS) give him the experience to do this task productively.

Eileen Leonard, the staff's "damn Yankee" because she was born on Long Island and continues to root for the Bronx Bombers, assists Parolisi with the NG contracts, heads up the division's energy emergency activity, provides staff support to the Governor's Energy Policy Advisory Committee, and generally serves as a Renaissance woman on the staff, "keeping everyone straight" as her colleagues lovingly put it. She brings twenty-nine years of Virginia public service to her tasks, the last three of them at DMME.

Robin Jones, another program manager, handles a wide variety of activities, ranging from biomass to renewables and farm audits and other agricultural initiatives.

Ken Jurman has worked with renewable energy ever since his college days in Colorado where he studied solar energy use. He has used this experience for over 20 years helping move solar and other renewable energy sources to the mainstream.

Wallid Daniel mixes his work to help Virginia state agencies implement demand control strategies and regular trips to Lebanon to see his family. Charlie Bartlett is DMME's energy circuit rider helping Commonwealth agencies implement performance contracting. Their combined previous experience as state agency energy managers is invaluable as they help with the on-the-ground work of energy management.

Barbara Simcoe, a twenty five year executive with the Association of State and Territory Solid Waste Management Officials (ASTSWMO) in DC, retired with her husband to Williamsburg, VA, theoretically to spend their time following NASCAR. Now, instead, she commutes from there every day to DMME in Richmond so she can bring her management experience to bear as SEP program manager, consumer energy education lead, and coordinator of the Division's multiple Recovery Act efforts.

Al Christopher was recently hired to serve as director of the Division. Speaking of car racing, he was on Air Force One in the early '80s, as a reporter for the Tampa Tribune, with President Ronald Reagan when he stopped in Daytona Beach for the running of the Firecracker 400. Al reports the highlight of that particular press junket was seeing the president flanked by Dolly Parton and Richard Petty for an iconic photo op before the race began, and also being given a packet of menthol cigarettes marked with the presidential seal as a souvenir of the flight.



Al Christopher, left, is welcomed as new director of Energy Division by Steve Walz, DMME director, in front of 1785 Virginia State Capitol, designed by Thomas Jefferson, Shockoe Hill, Richmond VA

He brings to his new position not only his experiences as a newspaper journalist, but also grounding in the oil industry. His childhood was that of an "oil brat" -- his family was in the business. After a 15 year distinguished career as a journalist, both in Newport News, VA and Tampa, FL, he returned to the family business by purchasing Kilduff Oil Co., a rural based operation in Virginia. More recently, he served as the executive director of the Virginia Clean Cities Program and the Hampton Roads Clean Cities Coalition.

The Division of Energy is one part of the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy. The Department also regulates safety and environmental controls on coal, mineral and gas and oil operations in the Commonwealth and is home to the State Geologist's office. The DMME is directed by Steve Walz, introduced to energy issues and programs as a VISTA volunteer in the mid '70s when he was managing weatherization and installing solar applications on green houses in Missouri and Nebraska. Steve, born in Rochester, NY, started in the Division of Energy in 1980 and, like any SEO official with that length of tenure, has seen the issue of energy ebb and flow dramatically over the last three decades.

Recent successes include getting state appropriations for the first time ever for SEO positions (two) in 2008, and engaging with Governor Tim Kaine actively in the process of finalizing their current ten year Energy Plan and enacting a broad range of new energy legislation expanding energy efficiency, setting out new regulatory standards for electric and natural gas utilities, and promoting development of renewable resources. He spends untold hours on weekends officiating at high school track meets, concentrating on all track events and all horizontal jumping competitions. He also recently officiated at the Virginia Senior Games.

In sum, the Division staff brings an extremely high level of dedication and expertise to the multiple tasks of operating "the SEO with a small staff doing great work." Kudos to the Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, Division of Energy.

