



News Advisory
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State Council Celebrates October as Cooperative Month; Three Honored with Cooperative Leadership Awards

Cooperation and the cooperative business model were celebrated at the Virginia Cooperative Council's Cooperative Month breakfast Oct. 6 in Glen Allen.

Held at the Glen Allen Cultural Arts Center on Old Mountain Road, the breakfast is VCC's annual gathering to kick-off October as National Cooperative Month.

Cooperative businesses are owned by their customers and operate according to seven service principles that emphasize democratic control, member service and community support.

Keynote speaker at the Oct. 6 breakfast was Rich Laroche, retired senior vice president of the Cooperative Finance Corporation and adjunct instructor at the University of Mary Washington. A longtime board member of the National Cooperative Business Association and current board chairman of the Cooperative Development Foundation, Laroche spoke at the VCC breakfast on "Building a Cooperative Economy."

Lindsay Reames, assistant secretary of agriculture and forestry in Virginia, presented a certificate of recognition from Gov. Terry McAuliffe designating October as Cooperative Month to VCC board president, J.T. Anderson, of Farm Credit of the Virginias.

Whitney Perkins, program and development assistant with Agriculture in the Classroom, also spoke to the approximately 70 cooperative leaders in attendance, providing updates on the program that helps young people learn about the sources of their food and fiber.

Three cooperative leadership awards were presented at the meeting, honoring individuals who have had a major and lasting impact on the cooperative business movement in Virginia. The awards were presented by Jim Belfield of Colonial Farm Credit, chairman of VCC's leadership-awards committee.

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Debra S. Swiderski received the *Career Cooperative Leadership Award*, for outstanding contributions to the furtherance and success of cooperatives in Virginia. A 23-year veteran of the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives, Swiderski has worked in all five service areas of the cooperative trade association. Swiderski served as an officer in the Virginia chapter of the Center for Energy Workforce Development and has long been an active member of the Virginia Association of Meeting Planners International and the Virginia Society of Association Executives. A long-time Henrico resident, she and her late husband Ray are the parents of two grown children, Julia and Luke.

Paul W. Rogers, Jr., received the *Cooperative Member Leadership Award*, for outstanding contributions toward the furtherance of cooperatives in Virginia as an organizer, member, elected officer or in some other volunteer leadership role. A lifetime farmer, Rogers has served on committees and boards of numerous agricultural, community and youth organizations, from the Tidewater Academy Board of Directors to the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Board of Agriculture. He has been a Colonial Farm Credit board member since 1981. He and his wife, Pam, live on their family farm in Southampton County, near Wakefield. They have two grown children, Paul and Sharon.

Erick R. Watkins received the *Young Cooperator Leadership Award*, which recognizes an outstanding young cooperator in Virginia, who is actively engaged in cooperatives in Virginia as an organizer, member, elected officer or in some other volunteer leadership role. A member of Farmers Cooperative, Colonial Farm Credit, and Dairy Farmers of America, Watkins grew up working on his family's 700-head dairy farm in Amelia. He has worked with various local cooperatives to help guide his family's business through several tough years in the industry. He has participated in Colonial Farm Credit's AgBiz Planner program, and he is currently a board member for Farmers Cooperative in Farmville.

About VCC: Founded in 1962 as the Virginia Council of Farmer Cooperatives, the organization's board voted in 2009 to adopt the name Virginia Cooperative Council to better reflect the expanding scope of cooperative organizations throughout the state. Visit www.virginia.coop for additional information.

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(Photos of Award Winners on Following Page)



Debra S. Swiderski



Paul W. Rogers, Jr.



Erick R. Watkins

Note: You can download high-resolution files of these photos and other photos from the VCC October Cooperative Month breakfast at <https://vmdaec.smugmug.com/Other/2017-VCC-Co-op-Month-Breakfast/>. There's no charge for the images.