SMECO launches Patriot Connect

In November, SMECO launched its new Patriot Connect program to help veterans and active military personnel who may be having a difficult time transitioning back into the community.

Media reports indicate that there is a high incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among returning military personnel, and it has been at the root of an increased number of suicides. Nationally, as many as 22 veterans commit suicide every day, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“For returning vets who may be unable to cope, dealing with a termination notice from SMECO could be the last straw,” said Austin J. Slater, Jr., SMECO president and CEO. “If we can help prevent just one tragic death by reaching out to the men and women who have served our country, then this program will have been worthwhile.”

What is SMECO doing?

For new customers, SMECO’s customer service personnel are empowered to waive the service...
application fee and the customer deposit for eligible veterans and military personnel.

For existing customer-members, customer service personnel may grant a payment extension to eligible veterans or active military personnel in need of assistance.

Beyond that support, customer-members will be directed to work with Tami Gardiner, SMECO’s Credit and Collections Director. According to Gardiner, “We’ve been contacting local agencies that provide services to veterans and military personnel, as well as organizations that provide funds to support veterans, and they have been enthusiastic about SMECO’s new initiative. We are reaching out to agencies because they can promote this program to the people who need it.”

What is SMECO’s goal?
SMECO’s goal is to help someone who is suffering from a stress disorder get one step closer to a normal life. But, many people with a military background are reluctant to ask for help. Friends and family members who know someone in need of assistance can help by making eligible customers aware of SMECO’s Patriot Connect program.

By making it easier for people with PTSD, combat stress, or related trauma to accomplish everyday tasks, we hope to help customer-members—people who have risked their lives in service to our country—with reintegrating into the community.

For more information, please visit smeco.coop/patriot-connect.
Make sure your contact information is up to date

SMECO uses the phone number it has on file for your account for a variety of services, so it’s important to make sure you provide up-to-date and accurate information for your account.

One key convenience of having your current phone number listed on your account is that our automated systems can identify you with that phone number, alleviating the need to have your account number handy. SMECO also provides emergency notifications and outage updates by phone. Plus, if you are a fan of texting to conduct business, SMECO’s texting service is for you! SMECO 24/7 texting enables members to receive bill notifications, pay their bill, report an outage, receive power restoration updates, and request outage status updates with a cell phone.

Many people no longer use a land line and may only use their cell phone for business and personal communication. If SMECO has your cell phone number on file, but you would prefer we use a different number to contact you, please call 1-888-440-3311 to speak to one of our contact center representatives. After you reach the main menu, press “4” or say “other,” then press “3” or say “phone number” to reach a representative who will change your number in SMECO’s system. (SMECO does not sell your account or contact information.)

Before you dig, call 811

Call Miss Utility by dialing 811 before you plant a tree or shrub, start a garden, or install a fence. SMECO will mark the location of underground power lines on your property.

Don’t plant your trees near overhead power lines. Trees that will grow 20–50 feet tall should be planted at least 30 feet from overhead lines.

One call will save you a lot of time, trouble, and money. It could also save your life!
SMECO employees raise $41,000 for local shelters

SMECO employees held two fund-raising events in 2015 and donated $41,322 in proceeds to three local shelters in November. Safe Harbor in Calvert County; Lifestyles of Maryland, Martha’s Place Transitional Home, in Charles County; and Wrapping Arms ‘Round Many (WARM) in St. Mary’s County each received $13,774.

Employees raised the money through the SMECO 75 Bike Ride held in June and the SMECO Annual Charity Golf Outing in October. Each year, the cooperative selects a different organization that will benefit from the fund-raising events.

Richard Jarboe, SMECO supply chain director, described SMECO’s involvement with the fund-raising event: “Many co-op employees volunteer for local organizations, but this is an event that we can work together on. We join our colleagues, contribute time and funds, enjoy the event, and support the local community. We are grateful for the support we receive from SMECO’s supply chain partners who make the charity golf tournament a success. We have held the charity golf event for 12 years and have given more than $120,000 to local groups.”

The events are supported by a group of volunteers, vendors, and the SMECO executive team.

According to Sandy Washington, Executive Director of Lifestyles of Maryland, “SMECO and its employees continue to be active contributors to those in need in our community. This contribution will provide much needed shelter for women and children in the county who would not have had anywhere else to lay their heads. This donation will
essentially provide over 800 bed nights as well as case management services to help these families get on their feet. We are honored that the co-op selected us as one of the recipients for this year, allowing us to serve these individuals who are trying to overcome so many barriers. Many of our clients are working, but they can’t afford housing. We allow them to stay up to a year. While they are here, we help them establish bank accounts, develop their skills, and find more permanent housing. These are women who are trying to help themselves, keep their children in school, and implement life-changing practices to improve the quality of life for themselves and their children.”

Safe Harbor in Calvert County provides shelter for abused women and children. Together with the Calvert County Health Department, they provide food, safety, counseling, medical services, and compassion to those seeking refuge. “We support individuals for up to nine months, and we provide transportation along with other resources to help them get back on their feet,” said Cindy Dunn, shelter manager.
“The St. Mary’s County WARM program gratefully accepts this generous donation from SMECO and its employees,” said Maria Scott, WARM chairperson. WARM is a sheltering program provided by the faith community and partners in St. Mary’s County. WARM relies on over 1,100 volunteers from the community through the season to ensure its success. “We essentially provide a dry and safe place out of the elements for adult men and women to sleep during the cold months of November through March,” Scott explained. “Since WARM is a complete volunteer program and does not have any consistent grants or routine funding, this considerable donation from SMECO is significant to our organization. It will help provide supplies, cover expenses and potentially enhance the program in ways we have not been able to in the past, due to limited funding.”

SMECO hosted its fourth annual bike ride on Saturday, June 6, 2015. Natalie Cotton, SMECO’s community and public affairs director, added, “Our annual bike ride receives great support from the Oxon Hill Bike Club and local bicycle enthusiasts.” Participants can choose among three bike routes of 29, 47, and 75 miles that start at the co-op’s headquarters in Hughesville and go as far as Colton’s Point in St. Mary’s County. Cotton added, “We are especially grateful to business partners who participate by donating resources to help make the SMECO 75 Bike Ride a successful fund raiser.”
Save the date for the 2016 SMECO 75 Bike Ride

SMECO has set the date for the fifth annual SMECO 75 Bike Ride—June 4, 2016.

The bike ride features 29-, 47-, and 75-mile routes. Funds raised in 2016 will be contributed to Melwood’s “Operation: Tohidu.” This program is a seven-day holistic retreat designed to help wounded veterans and active duty military overcome obstacles to their recovery and support their successful reintegration into their homes and communities. All monies raised will benefit military in Southern Maryland. Sponsors are the backbone of the Bike Ride’s success. For any local business interested in supporting the SMECO 75 bike ride and Operation: Tohidu, several sponsorship levels are available.

• **Rest stop sponsor: $5,000**
  Includes logo placement on giveaways and signage at the sponsored rest stop, recognition on the website and printed material, entry for six riders, and more.

• **Lunch co-sponsor: $2,500**
  Includes logo placement on giveaways, signage at the lunch and registration area, recognition on the website and printed material, entry for four riders, and more.

• **Promotional sponsor: $1,000**
  Includes logo placement at the event, recognition on the website and printed material, entry for two riders, and more.

• **Goodie bag sponsor: $500**
  Includes recognition on the website and printed material, entry for one rider, and more.

Interested in being a sponsor for the 2016 SMECO 75 Bike Ride or learning more? Please visit [smeco.coop/smecco75](http://smeco.coop/smecco75) or contact Natalie Cotton at 301-274-4377.

Registration for cyclists opens on January 1, 2016.
Is there money waiting for you?

You may have unclaimed capital credits from checks mailed in 2012.

As a cooperative, SMECO is owned by its customer-members. Members finance their business by using SMECO’s services and allowing the Co-op to retain any money collected in excess of actual operating costs. The money is used to build and maintain the facilities needed to serve the Co-op’s members and to service our long-term debt. This money is capital furnished by the members—capital that is returned to the members at a later date as Capital Credits. Capital Credits are refunded at the discretion of the Board of Directors.

In 2012, Capital Credit checks were sent to the last known addresses of all customers who were eligible for refunds. The checks represent a percentage of the Capital Credits earned from electric service provided from 1981 through 1985. Some of the Capital Credit refund checks have not been cashed and SMECO would like to refund these unclaimed Capital Credits to the rightful owners.

Check the list for your name, or the names of family and friends at smeaco.coop/missing-members. Refunds must be claimed by January 31, 2016.