

## Meet your Columbia REA Board of Directors



Patrick Dennis, PhD  
Professor Emeritus, UBC  
(retired)  
Program Director, NSF (retired)  
Walla Walla, Wash.

Patrick Dennis came to the Columbia REA Board of Directors in 2017 with more than 40 years of experience with looking at things differently.

As a scientist for 10 years with the National Science Foundation (NSF) in Washington, D.C., Patrick Dennis, PhD, had already made a career out of seeing things in a way that perhaps others didn't. And as a teacher for 27 years at the University of British Columbia, Patrick Dennis taught others how to do the same.

"As a scientist, you have to think long and hard about what you're doing. You have to be sure you're asking the right questions," says Mr. Dennis.

"Once you get an answer, you have to be prepared to take the next step...not do the same thing over

and over again. You have to reinvent yourself periodically."

Since retiring as Professor Emeritus from the University of British Columbia at age 65 (mandatory retirement age in Canada), and from the NSF in 2010 (he was employed by both institutions at once for a stretch), Patrick Dennis has relocated to Walla Walla (full-time since 2012), and stayed busy by assisting with the Whitman College Grants Office.

"Teachers and professors are teachers and professors, not grant writers. I help them really focus... help them present a clear plan." Then adds with a hint of pride, "90 percent of the grants I have worked on got funded."

Since his appointment to the Board in 2017 to fill a vacated



Patrick Dennis (left) with Columbia REA Board President Greg Knowles

### **Patrick Dennis receives Credentialed Cooperative Director Certification**

In December of 2018, Patrick Dennis received his Credentialed Cooperative Director (CCD) certification from the NRECA. The NRECA's Director Certificate Programs are specifically designed to help electric cooperative directors, at every stage of their service, understand their roles and responsibilities, stay up-to-date on the key issues and trends in the industry and prepare them to meet the challenges facing electric cooperatives now and in the future.

position, and subsequent re-election this year, Patrick Dennis has made it a point to make sure that the various issues faced by the Board are examined with a similar eye toward discovery and exploration of new ideas.

“At NSF, we were asked continuously to predict where science is headed. After 25 or 30 years, I developed a pretty astute sense to recognize where things were going and to always move forward. I started a number of programs that were ‘a little out front’...that pushed the frontier. My supervisors were a little uncomfortable at times,” he says with a bit of a smile, “but those projects paid off.”

“I’ve tried to bring that same philosophy to the Board,” he continues, adding that as Columbia REA moves into the relatively “new frontier” of renewable energy sources, it will become increasingly important to have a multitude of voices and opinions on the Board.

“I think the whole business of renewables is both an opportunity (to move Columbia REA forward) and a threat (to the existing business model). We have to understand how best to incorporate renewables into our load. We will have increased load if electric vehicles become as popular as people say they will. We will need to have capacity to charge these things. Chargers on the highway and other places are going to consume huge amounts of energy. Where do we get that? How do we load-balance over a 24-hour period?”

“There are lots of areas where we need to use our imagination and be open to possibilities. Otherwise,

you’ll get left behind and become just another normal organization.”

But he likes how this Board is positioned to handle these issues right now.

“Everyone has a vision of where the organization should go. But one person’s vision is only so broad,

membership by providing safe, reliable electricity at the lowest possible cost,” Pat’s own experience begins to illuminate his thoughts on what the role of the Board should be. “Every electric cooperative is different, with different challenges and different membership. I do a lot



Director Patrick Dennis (right) and Dr Arielle Cooley (Chair of Biology at Whitman College) discuss the complex regulation, evolution and expression of the multi gene determinants of flower color patterning in plants.

and it helps to have other people in the room providing ideas that supplement that vision.”

“If you look at our Board right now...some have been in the community for decades...they have ‘institutional memory,’ which is just as valuable as new ideas sometimes. Others, like me, are newcomers. I think I bring a different perspective. I also think our Board represents the diversity of our membership pretty well. That’s what it takes to make sure the Cooperative has vision.” When we get past the obvious function of the Board: “To make sure the Cooperative functions well and meets the needs of the

of reading, and these articles just get more and more interesting, because you’re always learning something,” adds Pat, with another smile.

“The responsibilities of a Director are kind of intimidating...just learning how the organization is glued together. We have a CEO and management, but at some point, there has to be oversight. We have a responsibility to ensure that the Cooperative is always moving forward and remains successful.”