



The Virginia 811 Dirt

WORKING AS ONE TO GET THE JOB DONE



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LETTER FROM THE CEO

B. Scott Crawford

Another Safe Digging Month has come and gone. I remember when I was in the classroom serving as a history teacher in a Virginia public high school I worked with a teacher who had a wonderful take on Valentine's Day. He would say, each Valentine's Day, "Scott, for my wife, EVERY day is Valentine's Day!" His love for his wife was not something to be highlighted and celebrated on a culturally defined day -it was timeless and something he celebrated every day. In some respects, those of us in damage prevention can relate – while April is "Safe Digging Month," EVERY month is safe digging month!

Of course, designating a month as "Safe Digging Month" is important for the damage prevention industry as it draws a large amount of attention to our noble cause: to protect life, property, the environment, and our respective areas' underground utility infrastructure, ensuring the level of civilization we all expect remains intact! Across the nation governors put forth proclamations, industry stakeholders advanced messaging through social media, stakeholders appeared on local news shows, and contests were administered to help draw attention to the roughly fifty-one 811 processes that exist across the United States – and even beyond!

Virginia 811 had a full Safe Digging Month this year. Over the course of April, the Virginia 811 team engaged stakeholders across the commonwealth. The team created and distributed brochures that were provided to permit offices throughout Virginia. These brochures are intended for individuals applying for permits and are being tracked. With Locator Appreciation Week falling in April, Virginia 811 celebrated the hard work locators do and their instrumental efforts to protect underground utilities. Locators had the opportunity to win prizes daily throughout the week. The Virginia 811 Display Truck was also leveraged throughout the month, driving more than 1,500 miles over the month and attending an all time high of roughly 18 different events!

However, one of the more exciting initiatives is the launch of Underline Quest, an augmented reality (AR), gamified mobile app just as Safe Digging Month began! In collaboration with MISS DIG and Texas 811, Virginia 811 worked with YottaFlex-AI to create Underline Quest and make it available to all iPhone and Android users. The mobile application allows users to examine, through AR, evidence related to a damaged utility. The AR image is juxtaposed and embedded within the user's real-world environment, allowing the user to examine evidence through their phone. The user then identifies the damaged utility and advances to determining the root cause, again, through the examination of evidence presented through AR imagery.

Once the user has successfully identified the root cause, the game changes slightly. The user now must "repair" the damaged utility. To do this, the user leaves the AR environment and plays a card game. Using cards that represent repair tools, the user must remove damage cards. Removing all of the damage cards over the course of three rounds results in the line being successfully repaired.

Underline Quest has three difficulty levels, allowing users as young as six years old to play the game yet still being able to challenge adults. The levels designed for teens and above also include a series of questions related to damage prevention the users must answer. Through this process, users learn more about underground utilities, what to do if a line is damaged, and the ramifications of lines being damaged.

If you have not done so, be sure to go to your respective mobile app store and check out Underline Quest. While Safe Digging Month is over for 2026, really, it is never truly over as every month is "Safe Digging Month"! Continue to participate by sharing information available through va811.com and through encouraging stakeholders you engage with to download and play Underline Quest.

ON THE COVER:

Virginia 811 team supporting the Junior Achievement Southwest Virginia Bowl-A-Thon

B. Scott Crawford
President & CEO
Virginia 811

National or State-Centric?

The "Partly Federal and Partly National" 811 Industry

- B. Scott Crawford

National conversations about 811 often approach 811's role in damage prevention as if there is a single national system, which is not entirely accurate. This misunderstanding was recently highlighted in an open letter published by the National Utility Locator Contracting Association (NULCA). The organization claims, referring to the 811 "process," that "the system is designed to fail." While there is not enough space in this article to fully elaborate on the various assertions and conclusions NULCA advances in now what have become two open letters, it is worth noting that there is no "system" designed to fail. In short, this is due to the framing of the U.S. Constitution and the role of state governments within the wider national governance framework. In actuality, there are at least fifty-one 811 "systems" in place nationwide as the states, and the District of Columbia, have unique and nuanced laws governing the protection of underground facilities.

The overall 811 construct in the United States is, in the words of James Madison articulating the structure of the national government under the, at the time, proposed Constitution, "partly federal and partly national." Federal, at the time Madison wrote these words, in 1788, refers to the states and their continued existence as constituted sovereign entities. As with the system of government framed within the Constitution, the 811 construct is only a single process with the federal government, through the Federal Communications Commission, making 811 the nationally designated dialing code requiring telecommunications providers to route 811 calls to the relevant 811 call center. Outside of this, and along with some regulatory expectations tied to damage prevention from PHMSA, the states have the power to create the way in which damage prevention within 811 is actually carried out.

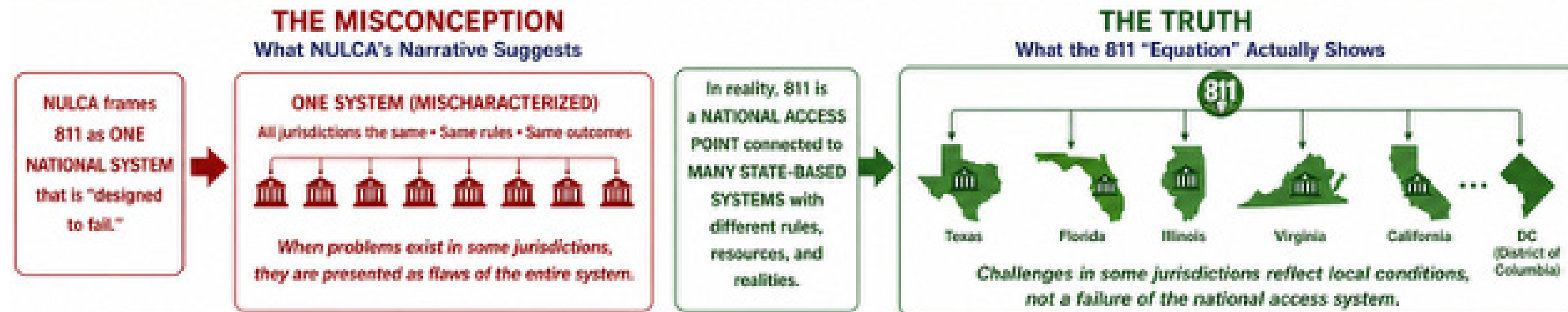
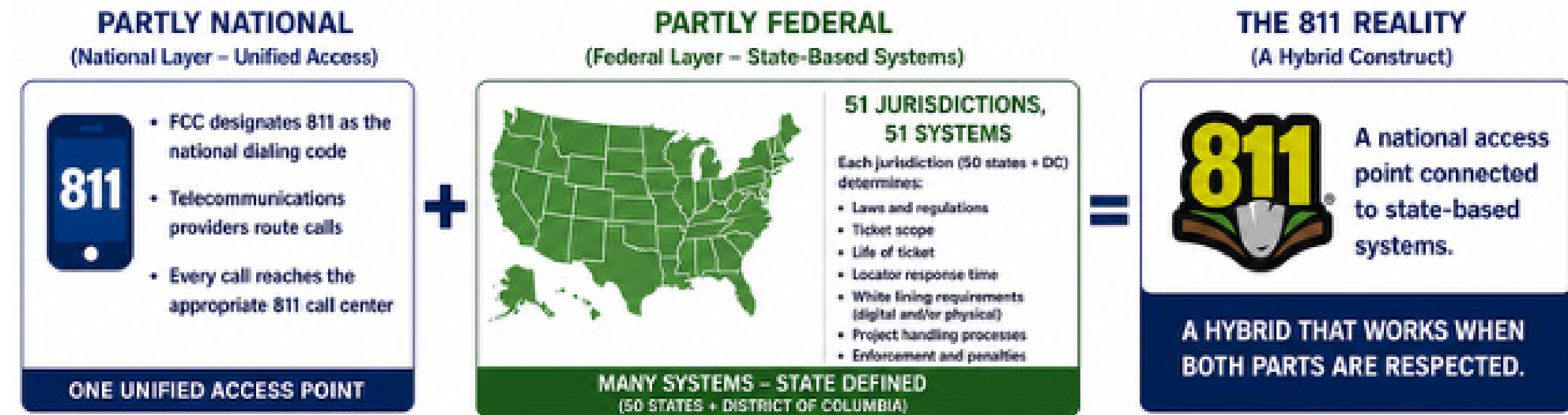
This "partly federal and partly national" construct undermines NULCA's assertion that the "system is designed to fail." 811, the national "system" mandating telecommunications providers to route 811 calls to a notification system is working incredibly well. There are but few and far occurrences where any 811 center is not receiving calls and transmitting locate requests. As such, it is not the "system" NULCA is actually addressing, it is the many systems – the "partly federal" – portion of the equation. This is at the heart of much wider debate across the industry about issues an alleged single system is facing, with generalizations about challenges advanced, that are not at all related to a system failure but rather involving some failures within different states. With fifty-one systems, and nuances, in place, trying to articulate national challenges is difficult and should be done with caution as generalizations viewed through a mono-system lens can obscure important state-level realities.


For example, NULCA highlights how "In one documented dataset, a single excavator submitted a locate request covering 464 million square feet, over 8,000 football fields, with a legal response window of two business days" (NULCA 2026). This rightfully highlights a serious issue that is tied to a single state's 811 system – not in any way a "national system." The fact that the locate request was submitted and transmitted demonstrates the national system, 811 routing calls to the notification center, worked. While I agree with NULCA that this particular example is egregious, this is not the "system" as it is only one example from a multifaceted network of systems. In Virginia, this locate request would not be legal as it would violate the scope of a legal request. As such, Virginia, and the numerous other states that would not allow such a locate request, should not be lumped into a generalization suggesting a particular national system "is designed to fail" or has failed.

THE 811 "EQUATION"

Partly National. Partly Federal.

Not One System – Many Systems Working Within a National Framework





THE KEY POINT

The 811 number and access layer (national) is functioning reliably. It is the many state-based systems (partly federal) that vary in performance, resources, and results. Conflating the two leads to misleading conclusions and misguided calls for national overreach.

NOT ONE SYSTEM. MANY SYSTEMS. ONE PURPOSE.

The 811 "Equation": National Access + State-Based Systems = A Hybrid That Works Best When Local Realities Are Respected.

When a process is multifaceted, and is "partly federal and partly national," to use national data to make gross generalizations about numerous 811 systems is distracting and not helpful – especially when only one utility, gas, is heavily regulated in the damage prevention industry. States need to dive into their data and their laws to identify the issues plaguing THEIR systems and take action. Stakeholders within the states need to work together to make THEIR systems work - and when finding solutions that work, share those solutions with the nation so that states can decide if those solutions can be applied to their state 811 system and work in a positive way.

The future of damage prevention does not depend on forcing fifty-one unique systems into artificial uniformity. It depends on states honestly identifying their own operational realities, improving their own systems, and then sharing successful practices with the broader industry, while recognizing that just because a practice works in one state it is not a guarantee it will work in another.

Let us dig in at the state level and collectively, across multiple 811 systems, move the needle toward zero damages – state by state!

Permit Projects Need 811 First

Help Expand Excavation Safety Outreach by Connecting Permit Offices with Critical Project Planning Resources



Virginia 811 recently launched the **Permit Projects Need 811 First** campaign to place excavation safety information directly into local permit offices across the Commonwealth. We are asking stakeholders, Local Damage Prevention Committee members, municipalities, and industry partners to help identify offices that could benefit from these resources.

Permit offices are often one of the first points of contact for contractors, excavators, and homeowners planning excavation or demolition work. Providing safety materials at that stage helps reinforce important information before projects begin.

Participating offices receive permit office handouts and brochure holders designed to keep materials visible and easily accessible, while Virginia 811 Public Awareness and Training (PAT) liaisons are available to provide support and answer questions.

Help us place these materials in local permit offices throughout your communities. Leveraging existing relationships to expand access to excavation safety information can strengthen damage prevention efforts and support safer projects across Virginia.

[Download Printable PDF HERE](#)

[Request a Permit Office Kit HERE](#)

Welcome Jeneen Lipford to the Team

Meet our newest team member as she begins her journey as a Damage Prevention Specialist



We're excited to introduce Jeneen Lipford, our newest team member, who is currently participating in spring training as she begins learning the important role of a Damage Prevention Specialist. This hands-on training period is designed to build the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to help protect our infrastructure and promote safe digging practices throughout our communities.

Throughout the program, Janeen is gaining valuable experience in collecting dig site information, providing customer service, and completing critical verification procedures. With guidance from experienced team members, she is building a strong foundation in identifying risks, collaborating with stakeholders, and helping prevent potential damage before it occurs.

We're proud of the progress Janeen is making and look forward to seeing her continue to grow as a valuable member of our team. Her commitment and dedication help strengthen our mission of "Passion to Serve, Dedication to Safety."

Please join us in welcoming Jeneen to the team!

- Diana Stokes | Manager of Operations | Virginia 811

811 FAST FACTS

CHANNEL	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
PHONE	169,824	24.98%
WEB	509,951	75.02%

Total YTD 2026
679,775



THE BROADBAND FIELD PLAYBOOK

What Excavators, Locators, and Project Teams Are Doing Right Now To Keep Projects Moving Efficiently Across Virginia

- Anita Scott

As broadband expansion continues across Virginia, one thing is becoming increasingly clear: the projects that move the smoothest aren't the simplest—they're the most coordinated.

And the people doing the work are saying it directly.

Planning Earlier Changes Everything

Milton "Buzz" Keese, Senior Project Manager of Construction, Damage Prevention and Training with Glo Fiber/Shentel, put it simply: "The earlier we can talk about the work, the smoother everything goes. It's not just about submitting locate requests—it's about planning together before work is scheduled so everyone is aligned from the start."

For Buzz and his team, that starts well before a locate request is submitted. Instead of waiting until work is ready to begin, they're proactively engaging locators in the areas where projects are planned and having early conversations about capacity - what can realistically be located in a day, and how to structure the work so it fits the field environment.

That shift has changed how projects are being built from the ground up.

Rather than sending large, complex locate requests, work is being broken into smaller, more manageable sections. In many cases, that means focusing on one side of a city block instead of an entire multi-block corridor. The result has been fewer delays, fewer revisions, and more predictable progress in the field.

Clarity Before the First Marking

Shana Dunaway, Supervisor Locating with UtiliQuest, LLC, reinforced that many improvements often come down to one thing: clarity before the work begins. "The more clearly the work area is defined upfront, the easier it is for locators to respond accurately and keep projects moving," said Dunaway.

Rather than treating locate requests as large, multi-area submissions, the focus is shifting toward defining work in smaller, realistic segments that can actually be completed within a day.

What's Working in the Field

Across both perspectives, the same operating model is emerging:

-  **Start conversations before work is scheduled**
-  **Align on realistic daily locate capacity**
-  **Break large projects into smaller, defined segments**
-  **Use EWL and clear marking to improve visibility**
-  **Match locate requests to what can realistically be completed**

The Takeaway

The message from the field is consistent: progress doesn't come from larger requests or faster turnaround alone - it comes from better-defined work and earlier coordination.

When teams take time to align upfront, projects move with fewer interruptions, less rework, and far better predictability.

And as broadband expansion continues across the state, that approach is quickly becoming less of a best practice - and more of a standard for success.

Milton "Buzz" Keese
Glo Fiber/Shentel

Shana Dunaway
UtiliQuest, LLC



HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Team Members Celebrating Their Service to Virginia 811 This Quarter

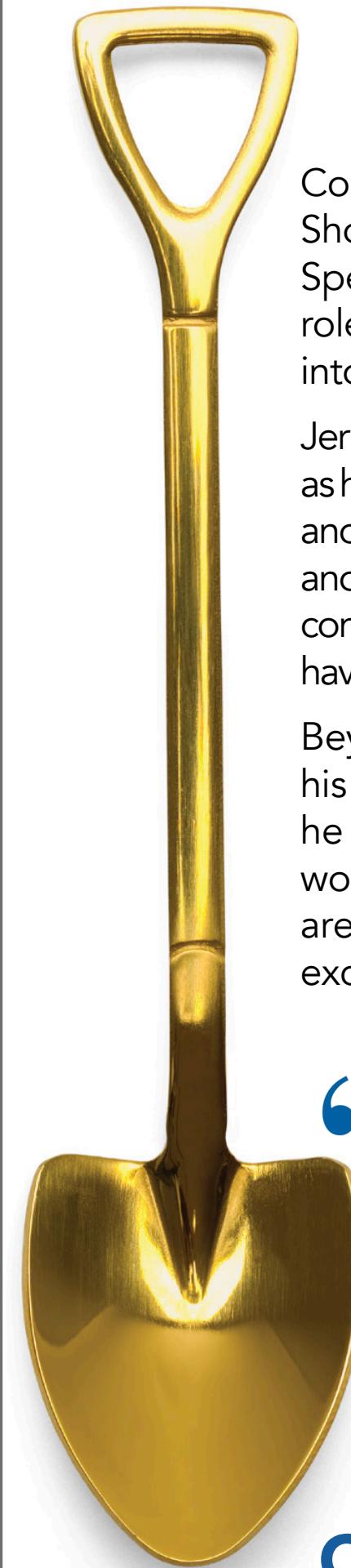
Marcy Carroll 4/8/2002 24 Years of Service	Lori Saunders 6/3/2002 24 Years of Service	Victoria Brown 5/15/2023 3 Years of Service
Dina Kimball 4/15/2002 24 Years of Service	Marcia Hill 6/10/2002 24 Years of Service	Cindy Lamm 5/15/2023 3 Years of Service
Dorothy Smith 4/15/2002 24 Years of Service	Missy Montaigne 5/27/2003 23 Years of Service	Tim Poole 5/15/2023 3 Years of Service
Cookie Rader 4/22/2002 24 Years of Service	Lisa Davis 6/29/2015 11 Years of Service	Stafany Abbott 5/13/2024 2 Years of Service
Diana Stokes 4/22/2002 24 Years of Service	Maya Lane 6/29/2015 11 Years of Service	Kayla Adkins 5/13/2024 2 Years of Service
Heather Minnix 5/13/2002 24 Years of Service	Nicole Hodges 4/26/2021 5 Years of Service	Nicky Mattingly 5/13/2024 2 Years of Service
Kari Harris 5/20/2002 24 Years of Service	Meredith Diedrich 4/25/2022 4 Years of Service	Kate Austin 4/7/2025 1 Year of Service
Alice Perdue 5/20/2002 24 Years of Service	Neva Zeedyk 4/25/2022 4 Years of Service	Katie Bittinger 4/7/2025 1 Year of Service
Brenda Matheny 6/3/2002 24 Years of Service	Eric Aldridge 5/15/2023 3 Years of Service	Ashley Holloway 4/7/2025 1 Year of Service

343 Years of Combined Virginia 811 Experience
THANK YOU FOR YOUR YEARS OF SERVICE

Recognizing Excellence The Virginia 811 Golden Shovel Award

JERRY ALTICE

2026 1st Quarter Golden Shovel Award



Congratulations to Jerry Altice, recipient of the 2026 1st Quarter Golden Shovel Award! Since joining Virginia 811 in July 2019 as a Damage Prevention Specialist, Jerry has continued to grow within the organization through several roles, including Sr. DPS and Web Ticket Quality Coordinator, before stepping into his current role as Web Ticket Quality Specialist in 2024.

Jerry was recognized for his dedication to supporting and mentoring his team, as well as his passion for quality, accuracy, and continuous improvement. Through his training and guidance, he has helped teammates better understand Web Ticket processes and responsibilities, always taking the time to ensure questions are answered and concepts are fully understood. His thoughtful explanations and creative examples have helped build confidence and strengthen the team's knowledge.

Beyond his technical expertise, Jerry's nomination highlighted his commitment to his coworkers and the positive impact he has made on those around him. His passion for the work, attention to detail, and drive to ensure partners are well supported reflect the values of teamwork and excellence that the Golden Shovel Award represents.

“ Jerry's commitment to accuracy and his willingness to invest in others reflect what the Golden Shovel Award is all about. ”

CONGRATULATIONS JERRY!



The Human Advantage In an Age of Artificial Intelligence

The following essay was written entirely by ChatGPT, a natural language generator chatbot developed by OpenAI. The prompt to which ChatGPT responded is “How do you see different human generations leveraging Large Language Models and Natural Language Processing tools, such as ChatGPT, Claude, and Copilot?”

The rise of Large Language Models (LLMs) and Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools such as OpenAI’s ChatGPT, Anthropic’s Claude, and Microsoft Copilot is transforming how people work, learn, and communicate. Yet one of the most fascinating aspects of this technological shift is how differently various generations are approaching these tools. Much like the rise of the internet, smartphones, or social media, AI adoption reflects the experiences, expectations, and habits shaped by each generation’s unique relationship with technology.



For younger generations—particularly Generation Z and younger Millennials—LLMs are often viewed as intuitive companions integrated naturally into daily life. Having grown up in a world shaped by smartphones, search engines, and digital collaboration, many younger users approach AI conversationally. They are comfortable asking AI systems to brainstorm ideas, summarize information, draft content, explain complex topics, or even serve as creative partners. For students and early-career professionals, these tools are becoming extensions of how they learn and process information. Rather than replacing human thought, younger users often see AI as accelerating exploration and experimentation.

Older Millennials and Generation X, meanwhile, frequently approach AI through the lens of productivity and efficiency. Many within these generations witnessed firsthand the transition from paper-based workflows to digital systems in the workplace. As a result, they often evaluate AI tools pragmatically: How much time can this save? Can it improve communication? Can it reduce repetitive administrative tasks? In professional environments, these users are increasingly leveraging LLMs to draft reports, organize meetings, analyze data trends, assist with coding, and improve customer service interactions. Their adoption tends to be more task-oriented and strategic.

Generational Adoption of AI, Digital Art, B. Scott Crawford with ChatGPT, 2026

Baby Boomers present perhaps the widest spectrum of adoption. Some remain cautious, viewing AI with skepticism or concern regarding reliability, ethics, and the broader societal implications of automation. Others, however, are embracing these technologies enthusiastically—particularly when the tools are framed as accessible assistants rather than highly technical systems. AI-powered voice interaction and conversational interfaces can make technology feel more approachable for users who may not have grown up in heavily digital environments. In many ways, NLP lowers barriers by allowing people to interact with technology using ordinary language instead of specialized commands.

Importantly, no generation has a monopoly on innovation, curiosity, or adaptability. While younger generations may adopt AI more quickly, older generations often bring critical judgment, contextual understanding, and professional wisdom that help guide responsible use. In fact, the most effective organizations will likely be those that combine the technological fluency of younger employees with the experience and discernment of seasoned professionals.

For industries such as damage prevention and underground utility protection, these tools also hold significant promise. AI systems may help analyze ticket trends, improve communication between stakeholders, assist with training, streamline documentation, and surface operational insights faster than ever before. However, the human element remains essential. AI can support decision-making, but trust, judgment, empathy, and accountability still belong to people.

Ultimately, Large Language Models are not simply technological tools—they are becoming mirrors reflecting how different generations think, adapt, and collaborate. The future will not belong to one generation’s approach alone, but to organizations willing to foster dialogue, learning, and cooperation across all of them.

DIGGING EAST OF EDEN

Exploring the Roots of Human Nature

A Review of *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck by Roy Lax

While I do choose to read different genres, if I were presented with the question, "what is my go-to book genre?", I would say literary fiction, because literary fiction often causes us to expand our thinking and explore questions that were previously unknown. Literary fiction novels that stand the test of time are considered classics, not because they are of a certain age, but because something within the writing allows the reader to live another person's experience, explore deeper meaning, and dig for what's below the surface.

"And this I believe: that the free, exploring mind of the individual human is the most valuable thing in the world."

(East of Eden, Chapter 13)

In *East of Eden*, John Steinbeck does more than simply tell the story of the Trask and Hamilton families in California's Salinas Valley. Steinbeck uses symbolism to explore the darkness and the beauty of what it means to be human. We don't have to dig too deep to discover the overall philosophical message, which we'll uncover later.

While much of the story takes place in the fertile Salinas Valley of California, early parts of the book begin in the colder northeast climate of rural Connecticut, in the Civil War era of the 1860s, with Adam Trask and his brother Charles growing up on a farm with their father, Cyrus Trask. It is here where we start seeing the not-so-subtle parallels to the biblical story of Cain and Abel. After their mother, who struggled with mental illness, died by suicide while they were still young, Charles and Adam grew up seeking the approval and affection of their emotionally distant father. As older teenagers, Charles and Adam mirror the biblical story of Cain and Abel when their father, Cyrus, favors Adam's birthday gift over Charles's, causing Charles to become jealous. Looking below the surface, we notice that throughout the book, 'C' and 'A' are repeated in names, hinting back to the story of Cain and Abel. Some examples include Charles and Adam; Cathy Ames, who becomes Adam's wife; and Cal and Aron, who are the twin sons of Cathy and Adam.

The lives of the Trask and Hamilton families intersect when Adam hires Samuel Hamilton, an Irish immigrant, inventive blacksmith, farmer, storyteller and philosopher, who serves as the moral center of the novel, to build a windmill-powered irrigation system for Adam's farm. Through this connection, Samuel meets Lee, Adam's house servant. Lee becomes the closest friend to Adam, however early in the relationship, Lee plays the role of the stereotypical Chinese immigrant of the time, using broken English and submissive mannerisms, while masking his true nature. In time, Lee becomes the intellectual and philosophical center of the Trask household.

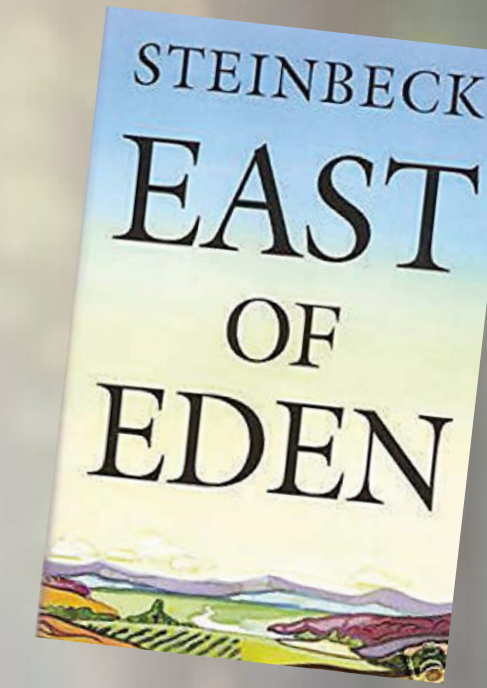
Throughout the book, Steinbeck portrays the Hamilton family, (which is based on his own family), as goodness without perfection, a stark contrast to the turbulent Trask family. Steinbeck writes himself into the novel as narrator and as Samuel's grandson. Adam eventually sees Samuel as a mentor, seeking his advice on life, family and farm. Samuel's good nature allows Lee to drop his public persona while they engage in philosophical discussions, which, after many years, lands on the story of Cain and Abel, and the Hebrew word, "timshel," translated to "thou mayest," and a discussion of free will; a turning point in thought for Samuel.

"But the Hebrew word, the word timshel—'Thou mayest'—that gives a choice."

(Lee, East of Eden, Chapter 24)

The Hebrew word, timshel, became the philosophical backbone to the book, as Steinbeck shares, through the characters Lee and Samuel, his belief in individual agency, and that we are not bound by a destiny passed down to us from previous generations. We can choose our own path.

When I read, *East of Eden*, back in January of this year, the two words 'thou mayest' stayed with me. I find myself returning to them often. Thou mayest. We are all faced with choices throughout our daily lives, and I lean into Steinbeck's belief in individual agency, fully aware that while I can make a choice, every decision produces a result. As the reader of this book review, and perhaps the novel itself, you may choose to consider how Steinbeck's words 'thou mayest' apply to your role in utility damage prevention, where individual choices carry real-world consequences.





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MOMENTS FROM OUR LATEST EVENTS

1. Roy Lax, Tim Poole, and Joseph Sparrow at the 25th Annual Blue Ridge Kite Festival in Roanoke. 2. Frank Giannini, Scott Crawford, Shana Linthicum, Kai Marxem, Diana Stokes, Stacey Clark, and Tim Poole at the Best Places to Work in Virginia 2026 celebration in Richmond. 3. Marty Mitchem, Frank Giannini and Roy Lax at the LDPC meeting in Roanoke, learning CPR and AED training. 4. Tim Poole and Stacey Clark at the Virginia Beach Shamrock Marathon in Virginia Beach with the VA811 Display Truck, sharing the Dig with CARE message with 25,000+ runners. 5. Kip Burlew and Joseph Sparrow in Roanoke at the Roanoke Valley Society for Human Resource Management May Chapter Luncheon. 6. Tiffany Uhl and Halifax County Service Authority Executive Director Mark Estes at the Virginia 811 General Membership Meeting in Winchester. 7. Brandon Massenbarg with the Dig Smart Mobile Learning Center at the Richmond Kickers in Richmond. 8. Fernando Mendez in Portsmouth, sharing the safe digging best practices with Bore Underground Solutions crews.



va 811.com



Dig With **CARE**

Passion to Serve,
Dedication to Safety.