

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

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FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

How are we containing our costs?



by Wayne Miller
President & CEO

ONE OF THE key differences between a cooperative and a private power company is our not-for-profit business model. This means we continually strive to provide the highest possible quality of service at the lowest possible cost. Without investors and Wall Street pressuring us to post a specific profit and return, we can focus completely on quality and cost of service.

As with all electric utilities, our costs fall into three categories: generation, transmission and distribution.

Together with electric cooperatives in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, we own about 70 percent of our energy supply, so we maintain fairly strong expense control in the area of generation. Our generation sources consist of nuclear and hydro power, which are, by their nature, stable generation costs. We are left with about 30 percent of our supply exposed to the price pressures of the energy market.

The costs we incur to get the power from the plant to our substations are transmission expenses. Given our size, it doesn't make financial sense for us to build our own transmission infrastructure, so we buy "space" on the transmission lines of other Pennsylvania utilities. Unfortunately, these costs are rising due to increasing load growth and demand for power.


Our personnel, buildings, equipment, poles and wires all make up our distribution expenses. From pens and paper to transformers and bucket trucks, prices have skyrocketed for everything that enables us to deliver electricity. At the same time, residential

and business expansion in our territory has been stagnant in recent years, so we have not had the benefit of load growth to offset the cost of inflation.

So, what are we doing to contain these rising costs in key areas?

We are constantly using methods that help us operate more efficiently without sacrificing our reliability and service quality. Some examples include:

- ▶ Moving toward digital mapping and automated meter reading systems, which will give us more detailed information, allowing our operations and office personnel to respond more quickly to outages and answer questions more thoroughly
- ▶ Changing our bill format to reduce mailing and processing time
- ▶ Purchasing construction materials through a regional utility supply cooperative to take advantage of price breaks
- ▶ Updating and expanding our coordinated load management system, which will further reduce our power supply costs during peak demand periods and help us minimize our carbon footprint
- ▶ Requiring all executive staff to scrutinize their budgets and defer or cut items that will not negatively impact customer service

In spite of our cutbacks and cost-saving initiatives, we will inevitably need to increase our rates in the very near future. The good news is that we are well-positioned to keep increases to an absolute minimum — not the 30-70 percent hikes occurring with private power companies. You can rest assured we are working hard to manage costs and we will continue to keep you informed of any changes to our bottom line and yours. 

TIME ON HIS HANDS

Gears are always turning for local clock repairman

BY SUSAN R. PENNING
Director of Member Services



VALLEY RURAL ELECTRIC member Richard Port is cuckoo for clocks. For three decades, the Hesston (Huntingdon County) resident has been repairing and restoring timepieces as a hobby.

“I started buying junk clocks at flea markets and fixing them,” Richard reflects. “The mechanics of the clockworks intrigued me. I liked the challenge of figuring out how they were put together ... which way the gears should go ... how many teeth they should have.”

Talent with tickers

Richard’s knack for clock repair and restoration stems from a long work history in the mechanical and electronic fields.

After high school, he served four years in the U.S. Air Force as an aircraft mechanic, stationed at Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana. Upon completing his enlistment, he moved to Lansdale, Pa., where he attended electronics school at the Philadelphia Wireless Institute. He built memory cores for computers for many years before retiring as a manufacturing manager at a company that made add-on memory for mainframes.

What he didn’t learn about the science of clocks during his careers, Richard picked up through his affiliation with the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors.

“The organization had a library. You could pay the postage and have books about clocks sent right to your door. I’d read them, then send them back. I learned a lot about clock repair through those books,” he notes.

Back to his roots

Prior to retirement, Richard and his wife lived, worked and raised their three daughters in southeastern Pennsylvania, primarily Bucks County. During that time, Richard sold many of his restored clocks in his wife’s antique shop in New Jersey.

It wasn’t until four years ago that the empty-nesters decided to return to their Huntingdon County roots. (They were both born and raised here.) The couple purchased a cottage near the lake and have been living the simpler life ever since.

ALL IN A DAY’S WORK: Valley Rural Electric member Richard Port spends his free time repairing and restoring mechanical clocks. He has enjoyed the hobby for 30 years. Here, he showcases his latest project, a cuckoo clock he’s fixing for a neighbor.



LEFT: Richard replaces a brass bushing, a tiny pin-like piece that is a vital part of the bearings of mechanical time-tellers.

RIGHT: Richard reveals the inside of a 1920s "Baby Ben" alarm clock.



"I remove the works from the clock and bring them to the shop. It would be too difficult to bring the entire thing here."

Richard charges about \$100-\$200 for a typical repair job.

"Sure, you can buy a clock cheaper in the store," he says. "People usually pay to get a clock fixed because it holds sentimental value ... maybe it was one that was in your family for several generations or maybe it was a retirement gift from your employer. Sentimentality is key in this line of work."

Up for the challenge

One of the most difficult projects Richard has tackled over the years was the restoration of an antique Rittenhouse clock. That brand was first made famous in the 18th century by renowned Philadelphia astronomer, inventor and clockmaker David Rittenhouse.

"The clock contained all wooden works. I had to cut out and file new tiny wooden teeth," Richard recalls. "The work was quite delicate and involved. It was a challenge to get (the clock) to time, strike and chime correctly."

It's that detail and variety in the work that keeps Richard content. In fact, he's worked on early 1800s pieces, modern pieces and everything in between.

"I guess I just love to troubleshoot," he admits.

Richard advertises his clock repair and restoration services in the Trading Post section of the *Valley News*. For more information on getting your own mechanical clock repaired or restored, call 814/643-1582. 🌟

"It was just so crowded everywhere else," Richard sighs. "Now I spend my time fixing clocks and working around the house."

Richard set up a small clock shop in his basement where he spends 10-20 hours a week tinkering with timekeepers.

"What's nice about my hobby is that it doesn't require a lot of work space," he points out. "And the parts aren't expensive. It's the labor that you put into each project that adds up."

Time is money

Richard works strictly with mechanical clocks (rather than quartz or atomic varieties) and averages about two to four repair requests at a time.

He has restored many different types of timepieces, including wall clocks, grandfather and grandmother clocks, schoolhouse clocks, cuckoo clocks, modern clocks and gallery clocks (characterized by their large displays that can be viewed from a distance).

"I usually get them because they don't work anymore ... they won't run or they won't chime," he says.

Richard tells his customers he needs about two months to finish a project.

"That gives me time to find the problem, pick up or order any necessary parts, fix the problem and run the clock for a while so I know it's working properly," he explains.

For large grandfather and grandmother clocks, Richard makes house calls.

Behind the times

How clocks work

Mechanical clocks typically use a mainspring and weighted pendulum to advance a pointer at a controlled rate. When the clock is wound with a key, the mainspring is tightened. As the mainspring unwinds, it turns the gears, which move the minute and hour hands at different speeds around the face of the clock. The pendulum ensures that the hands move at a regular pace. At the top of the pendulum are two hooks called pallets. As the bob swings, the pallets allow the escape wheel to turn slowly and evenly.

Galileo had the idea early in the 17th century to use a swinging bob to regulate the motion of a time-telling device. However, Dutch astronomer and physicist Christiaan Huygens is usually credited as the inventor. He determined the mathematical formula that related pendulum length to time (99.38 cm or 39.13 inches for the one-second movement) and



WORTH MORE THAN ITS WEIGHT: Richard's favorite piece is an antique Seth Thomas clock, which he bought at a flea market and restored to original condition. Seth Thomas is known as America's oldest clockmaker.

inspired the making of the first pendulum-driven clock.

Meet your employees

Highlighted in this column is a recent addition to the Valley REC team, Jason Hey. Jason came to the cooperative in April 2008 as a staking engineer in the Martinsburg District.

As a staking engineer, Jason has numerous duties.

"I meet with members regarding the requirements of new electric service. I submit work orders for pole replacements, system upgrades and equipment relocation," Jason explains. "I also take care of all PA One Call requests. And I coordinate jobs with the district manager and linemen supervisor."

Jason came to the co-op with some significant experience in his field.

A U.S. Air Force veteran, Jason spent four years as a communications systems technician (or 'cable dog' as it is dubbed in the military) stationed at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa Bay, Fla. There, his military technical school training and top secret security clearance allowed him to operate radio and satellite communications equipment and perform maintenance.

After completing his enlistment,



Jason Hey

Jason moved back to Pennsylvania and took a job as a cable line technician with Atlantic Broadband in Clearfield. He spent 10 years there, the last two of which he served as a supervisor. While at the cable company, he earned five certificates from the National Cable Television Institute and began familiarizing himself with global positioning system hardware and software. Jason then answered Valley's call for a new staking engineer and relocated to take the job.

A native of St. Augustine, Cambria County, Jason is a 1994 graduate of Cambria Heights High School. His wife of seven years, Melissa, works as an administrative assistant at a real estate agency

in Cresson, Cambria County. Jason's father, Richard, and mother, Sharon, live in St. Augustine. Jason has one sister, Melissa. Melissa and her husband, Jake, reside in Pittsburgh. They have two boys, Lexington, 5, and Gabriel, 1.

Jason and his wife currently reside in Gallitzin, Cambria County. They both enjoy camping and bike riding. Jason also enjoys fishing at Glendale Lake.

As for his job at Valley REC, Jason says he feels a great sense of accomplishment.

"I like the power industry," he says. "The necessity of electricity makes our job important."

He also notices a difference in co-op consumers versus the cable customers he served while with Atlantic Broadband.

"The attitude toward the cooperative is very positive. Now I get more compliments than complaints," he chuckles.

Jason is looking forward to a long career at Valley.

"I love the mapping and staking field," he says. "I'm excited to learn the new computerized mapping and staking equipment and software. It's great to incorporate technologies that take this business to the next level."

Jason's fellow employees at the cooperative look forward to working with him for many years. He's one of the people you can count on. 🌟

YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS THIS.

PLUS
\$15 bill credits
for all registered
members!

▶▶ **Valley Rural Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting**

April 17 - 7 p.m.
Mount Union Area High School

Featuring:

Entertainment by Steve Chapman
Elections - Districts 2, 4 & 6

Disney movies for the kids

Door prizes - Two \$250 co-op gift certificates

Watch for details!