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FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

# Exceeding expectations every day



by **Wayne Miller**  
President & CEO

**“Exceeds expectations.”**

My kids always combed their grade-school report cards for EEs, which showed they had attained the coveted “exceeds expectations” rating in aspects of school life that couldn’t be assigned a letter grade.

As they grew, EEs turned into (we hoped) A’s and B’s. Yet I don’t think either of them lost that

desire to exceed expectations.

At Valley Rural Electric Co-op, we also strive for EEs every single day. We don’t want to do what you only expect us to do — provide you with affordable, safe and reliable electric service. We want to go farther and do better, from providing superior member service to offering programs that help you save time and money.


Valley REC’s line workers are often the public face of our mission to exceed expectations. They routinely work in rough weather and put in long hours, as they did during our response to Hurricane Sandy in October. But they do it gladly, because they care about doing an exceptional job for you.

However, we have many people behind the scenes who also make our

cooperative the best it can be. Our engineers continually explore new technologies to improve service reliability. Our staff energy specialist can provide an energy audit to help you reduce heating/cooling losses in your home. Our office services department works to make your bill paying easier and more convenient, with credit card payment and levelized billing. Our consumer representatives want to make sure you have a positive and satisfying experience when you call our office for help. You can reach us Monday through Friday, 7 a.m.–5:30 p.m.

Because we’re a cooperative, we have a special responsibility to support the communities we serve and exceed expectations there, too. That means we aim to improve the quality of life of the people who live here by participating in food drives and other fundraising efforts.

Whether it’s a power outage or energy audit, a billing question or community event, we’re working hard to achieve those EEs from you every day.

If you have been randomly selected to participate in a member satisfaction survey, please fill out and return the card you recently received in the mail. This way, we’ll know if we’re meeting your expectations, exceeding them or need to improve in a specific area. 

# Valley crews ride out the storm



**OUTREACH:** Valley REC line worker John Fogelsonger goes out on a limb to restore power to residents in Morris Township, Huntingdon County, Oct. 30. Hurricane Sandy knocked out power to more than 6,000 Valley members but crews restored service within three days. (Photo by Doug Roles)

BY DOUG ROLES  
*Director of Member Services*

**ONE** windy, rainy and sometimes scary October night, a storm named Sandy cut power to more than 6,000 Valley Rural Electric members. But a team effort by the co-op's field and office crews restored service within three days of the tropical weather system's sweep across the mid-state.

Central Pennsylvania was spared the worst-case scenario that played out in other regions where Sandy was more hurricane-like. After days of ominous weather warnings, the story for Valley members was much the same as for neighboring residents: high winds and downed limbs meant lights out and time to hunker down until pole-climbing rescuers could restore normalcy.

"Most of it was just trees busting the wire down," said Boyd Gelvin, a crew chief in Valley's Shade Gap district. "We had several broken poles. We had members back in service pretty quickly, but in some places we just temporarily floated the phase wires to get power back on."

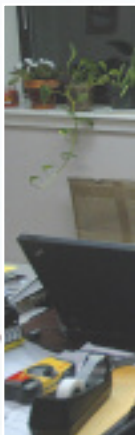
"I'd say this is probably the worst one for wind since I have been here," added the 21-year veteran.

Valley REC corporate office staff implemented a 24-hour shift the morning of the storm's arrival, Monday, Oct. 29, to handle phone calls from members. Line crews would work long days all that week. The number of outages in Valley's service area peaked during the Oct. 29-30 overnight. Fittingly, service was restored to all Valley accounts just before midnight on Halloween.

"That was an odd storm," said Todd Ross, Valley's operations manager. "We were very fortunate that some of our substations did not go offline."

"It was very spotty but where it did hit, it really pounded us," agreed Robert Wareham, Valley's vice president of finance and administration, who worked nearly around the clock with Ross during the storm response effort.

The mutual aid plan of Pennsylvania's electric cooperatives hastened the repair work. Two line crews from Northwestern REC (Erie and Crawford counties) joined the Valley restoration effort Wednesday morning. REA Energy (Indiana, Pa.) and New Enterprise Rural Electric (Bedford County) co-ops each





**TEAM EFFORT:** Clockwise from top, left: Lineman Logan Booher prepares for a climb as crew chief Curt White looks on. Supervisor Mark Booher uses a CB and cell phone to coordinate the efforts of his crews in the Shade Gap District. Logan Booher takes charge of pulling new line into place. Valley operations manager Todd Ross (seated, right) and Valley REC Vice President of Finance and Administration Robert Wareham worked side by side for hours on end to track outages and coordinate repairs. (Photos by Doug Roles)

dispatched a crew to Valley territory Tuesday. As many as a dozen contracted line construction and right-of-way clearing crews participated in the repairs.

Gelvin said working in the aftermath of a storm and putting in long hours raises challenges that make crews extra vigilant. Workers must be on guard against fatigue and watch out for each other.

"My wife worries about it," Gelvin said. "I check in with her though to make sure everything's OK at home. I'm sure all the line workers' families worry about them, especially in storm conditions when we're taking a tree off a line and 50 yards back in the woods, you can hear other limbs coming down. It's pretty hairy; it's pretty dangerous."

"On a normal day, I may be working with a crew of three or four, but in a storm situation I work closely with another guy," Gelvin said. "He looks out for me and I look out for him. We have good linemen."

Valley Rural Electric has followed an aggressive right-of-way trimming and maintenance plan over the past 15 years. That preparation kept the co-op's damages from being much more extensive. A freakish October 2011 snowstorm caused Valley's last large outage. ☀





PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

# PennDOT employees get electrical safety refresher from Valley REC

BY DOUG ROLES  
*Director of Member Services*

**A VETERAN** Valley Rural Electric Cooperative presenter reminded Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) employees in Fulton County of some electricity safety basics during a fall highway department meeting that highlighted the hazards state road crews can face every day.

Luanne Eckenrode, Valley REC vice president of consumer services and public relations, walked her audience through a number of scenarios involving downed wires and inadvertent contact with power lines using the tried and true “Safety City” display.

The Valley display used at the Hustontown Fire Hall for the event is tailor-made for presentations to school students, but captures the attention of adults just as quickly. In one scenario, a motorist wrecks into a utility pole and a wire comes down.

“This happens about a dozen times a year in our area, that wires are down on or near a vehicle,” Eckenrode said. “Consider any downed wire to be energized and call the utility.”

Eckenrode explained that in this scenario the vehicle and occupants are all energized to the same electric potential, so drivers and passengers likely are safe for the moment. If forced to leave the vehicle

before help arrives, occupants should jump outward, landing on both feet, then shuffle away.

Other scenarios show safety concerns when using ladders or tall equipment near overhead wires.

But electrical safety was just one portion of the PennDOT session.

“We do the winter maintenance meeting every year,” said Gary Davis, a PennDOT roadway program technician. “It recognizes service and reviews the year’s activity. But the big thing is safety, especially with winter coming up.”

Davis said PennDOT crews in each county have their own annual meeting. The audience of about 80 Fulton County employees was reminded of the danger inherent in their job by a display of the PennDOT Traveling Memorial

set up in the fire hall parking lot. Employees attending the meeting could view the memorial between sessions. PennDOT district 9-0 officials said the memorial features 84 crosses topped with hard hats

and draped with safety vests representing PennDOT employees who have lost their lives in the line of duty since 1970.

“This is the first I’ve gotten to see the memorial,” said Valley member Scott Saylor of New Grenada. “It’s kind of an eye-opener. It really hits home, that there’s been this many people killed working for the same organization.”

One of the biggest dangers to PennDOT work crews is traffic. Employees doing traffic flagging work are often working near a hazard.

“We cover I-70 and you don’t know who is in those vehicles or what they’re doing,” Saylor said. “There have been people here in our own county who have had close calls.”

Saylor is a diesel mechanic and has worked with PennDOT for three years. He can appreciate what a long and safe career with the highway department means, since both of his grandfathers are retired PennDOT mechanics.

In 2011, there were more than 1,800 work zone crashes in Pennsylvania, resulting in 21 deaths, including one highway worker. In District 9 (Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Fulton, Huntingdon and Somerset counties) during the same time period, there were 64 crashes, most of which involved an aggressive or distracted driver. PennDOT reminds motorists who speed or drive distracted that they pose a great risk to not only the highway workers, but also other drivers and themselves. ☀

**ABOVE:** Luanne Eckenrode, Valley REC vice president of consumer services and public relations, explains some electrical safety basics.

**RIGHT:** Valley member Scott Saylor of New Grenada, a diesel mechanic with three years of PennDOT service, takes in the PennDOT Traveling Memorial.

