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Rural Electric
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Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

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GUEST COLUMN

Wrap yourself in the joy of the season

BY LUANNE ECKENRODE

Vice President, Consumer Services & Public Relations

WHAT AN exciting time of year this is! The holiday season is here. There's a chill in the air that suggests a white Christmas. People are taking time off to be with family and friends — in the woods hunting deer, in the stores shopping for that special someone, and in their homes celebrating the coming of a new year.

While the holiday season is full of excitement, we sometimes miss the magic as we juggle shopping lists and parties while finishing work projects before the end of the year. These tasks can add stress, not joy, to the holiday season. Those of us at Valley REC want you to think of your electric co-op as an early Christmas gift wrapped with several layers of value to help you decrease the holiday overload.

As a member and owner of Valley REC, you receive several money-saving perks that can come in handy at this time of year. Did you know you can save at local and national businesses with your Co-op Connections® Card? You may even find discounts for the top-secret ingredients in your famous green bean casserole or fruit cake at www.connections.coop, where Touchstone Energy has teamed up with Coupons.com. Before you do your holiday shopping or baking, why not see what kinds of deals are waiting for you.


Expecting a lot of family visits over the holidays? Every kilowatt-hour saved counts! Valley REC representatives can offer tips and advice on how to manage your electricity use. We can suggest

more efficient holiday lighting options. And our website, www.valleyrec.com, features the HomeEnergySuite, where you can learn how your household is using electricity.

You don't need to take time out of your jam-packed holiday schedule to come to one of our offices to pay your bill. Instead, make a quick call or visit our website to pay your bill using our electronic billing and payment options.

Residents of our communities established your electric co-op 75 years ago to power their homes, farms and businesses, and to empower members to improve their quality of life. That is still our purpose. Valley REC provides an invaluable benefit — a dependable supply of electricity on which you can rely as you bake cookies and string lights on the tree. And our employees — your friends and neighbors who ensure that you receive reliable, affordable service — can be found volunteering in their communities throughout the year to make life a bit better for all.

So, have yourself a little less hustle and bustle this season. Take some time to watch the excitement in the eyes of your children and grandchildren as they count down the days. After the gifts are wrapped and the turkey is roasted, enjoy the coffee and the pumpkin pie. Take time to look into the faces of those around your table. They are your purpose. The rest of the holiday scramble is just details, and we can help you take care of a few of those.

On behalf of all your friends at Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! 

Hunter's luck takes outdoor writer down distant trails and back home again

BY DOUG ROLES, *Director of Member Services*

"DID YOU get your deer?" It's a phrase that's heard in every corner of Valley REC territory this time of year, and it often leads to an animated tale about how the hunter did or didn't put some venison in the freezer. It also shows how much hunting is a hallmark of life in central Pennsylvania.

Many an angler or hunter has headed afield thinking it would be great to make a living from this favorite pursuit. One local outdoorsman has been able to travel that path and says doing so requires a balance.

"There are rewards," says Valley REC member Freddie McKnight of Shirley Township, Huntingdon County. "But you have to be careful not to turn a pleasure into drudgery. You have to be realistic about the financial return."

Freddie operates a video, writing and photography business, "Working Man Outdoors," and is marking his 20th year as an outdoor writer. He says a part-time approach has proven the best fit for his family-man lifestyle. He has worked solely as an outdoor writer but more often has had other, full-time employment with his journalistic pursuit. He works now for his father-in-law's family business, Querry's Sanitation Service, while continuing to look for opportunities in what he sees as an ever-changing field. His weekly column ("Fishing and Hunting in the Appalachians") in *The Valley Log* newspaper is where his work as an outdoor writer began.

Freddie calls his start two decades ago a case of "hunter's luck." He picked up a December copy of "*The Log*" at the Cassville Superette, Huntingdon County, because a hunting photo (he can't remember if it was a picture of a deer or turkey) caught his eye. Near the story was a notice from publisher C. Arnold McClure that an outdoor columnist was wanted.

A 1983 graduate of Southern Huntingdon County High School, Freddie had attended Penn State Altoona for three semesters. He was pursuing an entomology degree in the hopes of starting a forestry career that would get him outdoors. He says it took him a year and a half to figure out college wasn't for him. He had no desire to keep going and balked at paying for classes not related to his major. But the experience was a precursor of things to come.

Freddie remembers a writing professor liked his writing

style and suggested he change his major to English. Freddie laughed at that time, but eight years later to the day of that conversation, his first column appeared, in 1993. He titled the piece "Anti Hunting: What are you doing about it?" In it, he suggested that anti-hunting rhetoric surrounds us, such as in police reports that use the words "hunting rifle" or "hunting knife" instead of just stating that a "rifle" or "knife" was used in a crime. Freddie says what sold McClure ("Arnie" to those who know him) on the column was the inclusion of a local report

that mentioned area residents and upcoming fishing and hunting events. Arnie says he approached Freddie about penning a column after a phone call from a reader.

"I got a call from Freddie's mother who told me her son was a great writer, but had given up on writing," Arnie relates. "He's been very successful. He's an avid hunter and fisherman, and he's a bit of a character."

"I've always felt a columnist needs to be a bit of a character," Arnie says. "When I started *The Valley Log*, I felt there were many talented people in our area who just needed a forum. I'm pleased with his success."

"I figured I'd have two years and be done," Freddie says. "But 20 years later, I often have four or five ideas each week for a column. Things just keep changing."

"I write from the seat of my pants. What's on my mind is what comes out," he says. "Then my wife edits it." (His wife, Tammy, previously worked as editor of *The Valley Log*.)

Freddie began to write for regional outdoor publications, such as *Pennsylvania Afield* (later published as *Pennsylvania Outdoor Times*), and to do seminars at venues such as the Jaffa Sports Show in Altoona.

"When I started out, it was double spacing on the typewriter," Freddie says, adding that he used to send photos to editors at night, when email was in its infancy, in order not to tie up local phone lines.

Through his various projects, Freddie began meeting other outdoor writers. He started video work in 2000 and has served on pro staff for companies such as bow maker Horton. He's amazed at how much he's learned.

For example, in video work it's the videographer who controls the hunt. If there is not enough light to film, the camera operator may have to tell a TV show host that he or she is passing on a shot,



HANDS ON: Outdoor writer Freddie McKnight is in his 20th year as a columnist and wildlife photographer. His balanced approach has allowed him to pursue hunting opportunities while minimizing the stresses of the craft.

PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

much to the chagrin of the hunter. Self-filming has cost Freddie chances when he couldn't get the camera shot and the bow or rifle shot to match.

Low pay, being away from home, early mornings, weather extremes and no longer having a choice to hunt or not all wear on the outdoor journalist.

"It's definitely different being in the woods when you make it a business," Freddie says. "I have friends in the industry who are 300-plus days a year living out of a suitcase."

"I'm doing more seminars now. That's my outlet. I'm trying to teach people and get them involved in the outdoors," Freddie adds.

He got into the predator hunting seminar circuit several years ago. He said calling was something that always held his interest. He remembers carrying a Smith record player, battery and speaker into the woods in the late 1970s. Then he moved to cassettes.

In fact, he still puts the cassettes to use, saying if all hunters are using the latest electronic digital call, sometimes the fox want something different.

Freddie also serves on Gov. Tom Corbett's Governor's Advisory Council for Hunting, Fishing and Conservation. He joined the council in February 2012 following a letter of recommendation by state Rep. Mike Fleck (R-Huntingdon).

The 34-person board advises the governor on sporting issues.

"Most of it comes back to deer," Freddie says.

He tells people Pennsylvania has a land access problem more than it does a deer problem. He says studies have shown 85 percent of hunters hunt public land, but just 45 percent of the deer harvest takes place on public ground. Freddie believes the antler restriction program has changed the makeup of the deer herd.

"We have more and bigger bucks," he says, though he personally doesn't hold out for a trophy. He figures if a legal buck walks in front of him "that's what God has provided that day."

Freddie says the last 20 years have seen a lot of change. He says there are not as many youth hunters today and believes this is because children, overall, spend less time outdoors.

"Growing up in Cassville, we had three TV channels and they weren't watched much, unless the weather was bad," he remembers. "When I started hunting, squirrel season was as big as deer season."

Posting and leasing of ground is another big change. Freddie used to walk from his boyhood home over the neighboring properties without trespassing.

"And people are quick to give up," he says, noting that an aging

population of hunters doesn't trek as far. "I don't hunt the places I used to like I used to. We're all getting older."

Another change, he says, is that there are more tools. Scouting is done by trail cameras, and hunters have easy access to detailed topographic maps.

"We put boots on the ground and that was our scouting," Freddie says. "Today people spend more time getting ready for rifle deer season than actually hunting. By the third day of the rifle season, crowds are almost non-existent."

Another big change is in farming methods – the clearing of fencerows, the use of sprays and better harvesting methods that leave crop fields sanitized. It's a boon to the farmer but has hurt populations of quail and pheasant.

Despite advances in science, Freddie believes we'll never have hunting and fishing totally figured out because of influences such as weather, habitat change, population fluctuations and threats like chronic wasting disease. He points out there are beaver now where there were none before, but fewer muskrats in places. Bald eagles are back and rock bass numbers have rebounded after dying off several years ago. There are fishers and coyotes in the woods again and elk up north.

"Hunters themselves change habitat and animal behavior," Freddie notes. "Consider this: Each time a hunting camp is built, a 14-acre safety zone is created."

Freddie considers himself equal parts hunter and angler.

"It's a daily thing. I'm always on the lookout," he says.

He jokes that his favorite animal to hunt is "the next one that's in season," though he favors waterfowl and predators. To those thinking of trying hunting, he advises, "Get with somebody and go out along. See if you like it before you spend money on gear."

Freddie's outdoor career has had many highlights. One that means a great deal to him is when Trapper and Predator Caller chose his piece on trapping woodland fox as the full-color center spread of their annual, *"The Trapper Yearbook."* Other highlights include hunting in the Mossy Oak Playground of Alabama, hunting with Ken Piper (editor of *Buckmasters* magazine) and bagging deer on the same evening and meeting many of the industry's biggest names.

"A lot of people dream of doing these things and I've been able to do them as a partial or secondary career," Freddie says. "It's a lot of hours and don't expect to get rich from it. For me, it's been an accumulation of what I've done all my life." 🌞



Top: Freddie McKnight displays a snow goose harvested in Lebanon County in the 2004-05 season. Inset: Freddie poses with a Pennsylvania coyote taken in February 2009. Above: Bighorn sheep, behind Freddie, graze in the Colorado Rockies in 2007.

PHOTOS COURTESY WORKING MAN OUTDOORS

Mark your calendar: Nominating meetings to be scheduled for early February 2014

HOW CAN you be involved in your co-op and enjoy a great meal? Attend your district nominating meeting coming up in February. Valley REC's service territory is divided into nine districts. Nominating meetings are held on a three-year rotation to nominate members for election to a three-year term on Valley's board of directors. Nominees are elected during the annual meeting in April.

This year, there are nominating meetings in Districts 1, 3 and 5. Members living in the following areas will be eligible to participate in the nomination process:

District 1 — *Bedford County*: Bloomfield and Woodbury townships. *Blair County*: Blair, Huston, North Woodbury, Taylor and Woodbury townships.

District 3 — *Bedford County*: Liberty Township. *Huntingdon County*: Carbon, Hopewell, Lincoln, Penn, Todd and Walker townships and Marklesburg Borough.

District 5 — *Centre County*: Ferguson and Harris townships. *Huntingdon County*: Barree, Franklin, Jackson, Logan, Miller, Morris, Oneida, Porter, Spruce Creek, Warriors Mark and West townships.

Invitations and postage-paid reservation cards containing additional details will be mailed to members in the above areas in the coming weeks. You will be presented your meal

ticket(s) at the door on the night of the meeting.

Of course, attendance at a district nominating meeting is just one of the many benefits of membership in the co-op. Unlike private power companies, rural electric cooperatives like Valley are owned and governed by the people they serve. That means consumers like you have a voice in how the business operates and a voice in who will represent your interests.

So, if you're a member residing in Districts 1, 3, or 5, plan to come to your district nominating meeting and exercise your rights. After you receive your reservation card in the mail, simply return it to us, circle the date on your calendar and start looking forward to an evening out with your co-op neighbors. Enjoy the meal and an interesting and informative co-op business session.

Remember, the Valley REC Annual Meeting is scheduled for Friday, April 11. It's another occasion where you can participate and learn more about the electric utility that delivers reliable, affordable power to your household all year long. ☀

Valley Rural Electric Co-op Annual Meeting
Friday, April 11, 2014
Huntingdon Area High School



Photo contest

Do you have a prize-winning light display this year? Valley REC and its sister co-ops are participating in the WJAC-TV Holiday Lights contest. Go to www.wjactv.com and click on the contest link. Submit a photo of your light display. Then tell your friends to go to the site and vote for your photo. Photos can be submitted from Nov. 25 to Dec. 22. Voting takes place Dec. 23 to Jan. 5. Visit the site to submit photos and view the prize package.

Winter home heating assistance available

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps eligible families pay their heating bills. LIHEAP offers assistance in the form of a cash grant (sent directly to the utility company) or a crisis grant for households in immediate danger of being without heat.

The application period for the Cash Program opened Nov. 4. There are three ways you can apply for LIHEAP: online, on paper or in person.

You can apply online for LIHEAP benefits by going to www.dpw.state.pa.us and clicking on the "For Adults" tab on the left side of the website. Then click on the "Heating Assistance/LIHEAP" option.

You can download an application from the site and mail it to your local county

assistance office or visit your local county assistance office to apply. Income guidelines are available on the website or at your assistance office.

In addition to the cash program, households experiencing a heating crisis may be eligible for additional benefits through one of the two components of the LIHEAP crisis program – the Crisis Exception program and the Regular Crisis program.

Households without heat may qualify for additional help through the Crisis Exception program. Households are considered "without heat" if the main heating source or second heating source (a source that is used to operate the main heating source or used if the main heating source is not working) has been completely shut

off, or if a household has almost run out of its supply of main heating fuel (coal, fuel oil, kerosene, propane, wood, etc.).

Assistance may be available through the Regular Crisis program if you have an emergency situation and are in jeopardy of losing your heat. Emergency situations include: broken heating equipment or leaking lines that must be fixed or replaced, lack of fuel, termination of utility service, danger of being without fuel (less than a 15-day supply), or of having utility service terminated (receiving a notice that service will be shut off within the next 60 days).

For more information, please contact your local county assistance office or contact the LIHEAP hotline at 1-866-857-7095, Monday through Friday (individuals with hearing impairments may call the TDD number at 1-800-451-5886).