

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

10700 Fairgrounds Road
P.O. Box 477
Huntingdon, PA 16652-0477
814-643-2650
1-800-432-0680
www.valleyrec.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Corporate Office Hours
Monday - Thursday
7 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Huntingdon/Martinsburg/Shade Gap Office Hours
Monday - Thursday
7 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Outages & Emergencies
1-800-432-0680

From the President & CEO



The ‘Cooperative Party’

By Rich Bauer

DURING this time of year, the juggernaut that we call American politics is in full swing. To make matters worse, it is a presidential election year, so media outlets are jammed full with updates, polls and advertisements for “Candidate X.”

Though this process is extremely important, I believe things have gone overboard with the name-calling and “dirt” each candidate is trying to dig up on the others. The constant barrage of “Republican this” or “Democrat that” has caused a greater divide between the people. I just wish all candidates would tell us their beliefs and leave the smear campaigns at home. As important as this election is, I for one, will be happy when it is over. May the best person, the people’s choice, win.

Having said that, most people tie Election Day to November. What some people forget is that there is another important election every year in April. It is your cooperative’s annual meeting and election of directors. It doesn’t matter if you are a member of the Republican, Democrat or Independent Party, because at this election, you are all members of the “Cooperative Party.” Candidates are chosen by members and elected by members. If you receive electricity from the cooperative, you are eligible to vote and have your voice heard.


Because we have nine directors, each elected for a three-year term, every year there are three director seats up for election. The candidate(s) are chosen by the members each February in their specific district, and their names are put on a ballot to be voted on at the

cooperative’s annual meeting.

This year, on Friday, April 8, your cooperative will hold its 77th annual meeting at Huntingdon Area High School. The board chairman and yours truly will give an update on the cooperative, as well as let you know what is happening in the electric world. Door prizes will be given to every member, and special musical entertainment will be provided by Steve and Anne Chapman. Mixed in the middle will be the election of the three director seats.

I like to joke around about the “Cooperative Party,” but in all honesty, if there was one, I would definitely be a registered party member. To me, the cooperative is the most democratic method to operate a company or nation. Valley REC is owned by those we serve. Our members elect their leaders (the board) and rely on them to look after the best interests of the cooperative. If big business or special interest groups move into our service territory, they get one vote, just like a small seasonal account, and because the cooperative is a not-for-profit business, we cannot be given campaign funding or be bought out by special interest groups. It is truly the best business model, and I wish that our government would follow our lead.

You should be proud to be a part of the Cooperative Party, and I hope to see you exercise your right to vote April 8.

As always, if you have any questions, comments or concerns, please feel free to contact me anytime. Enjoy the beauty of spring and all that Mother Nature has to offer in our beautiful corner of the world. Thank you and God bless. 



NO PLACE LIKE HOME: A flying squirrel figures out its next move after crews lower the top of a damaged pole to the ground. This pole was damaged so badly by woodpeckers that it had to be replaced.

BY THE NUMBERS: ANIMAL IMPACTS ON THE CO-OP

55 – Number of animal-caused outages in 2015

241 – Total number of animal-caused outages in the past four years

\$10.51 – Price of a plastic animal guard

90 min. – Average time to get members back in power when critters strike

Critters – our costly co-op neighbors

By Doug Roles
Manager of Member Services

AS THE weather warms, the co-op’s line crews are not the only ones gearing up for the spring/summer work season. Critters are increasingly on the move, too, looking for new living spaces and food sources. As much as co-op employees and members appreciate the area’s wildlife, squirrels, snakes, beavers, and birds sometimes run afoul of the distribution system that brings electric power to co-op homes, farms, and businesses.

Animal impacts to the system can pop up in surprising ways. The co-op’s approach is to prevent these negative interactions where possible and to quickly identify hazards before they can interrupt service.

“Animal-caused outages are just a part of life at an electric co-op,” says Todd Ross, Valley REC’s operations manager. “We try to be prepared, but we also know we’re going to have times when animals make contact with our lines.”

Last year, Valley REC had 55 animal-related outages. That number was 43 in 2014, 80 in 2013 and 63 in 2012.

To put those numbers in perspective, in 2015 Valley REC had 80 weather-related outages and 148 in 2014. Though they don’t have the top ranking, animals certainly do their part when it comes to racking up outage hours and inconveniencing members.

The 55 animal-related outages last year impacted 3,200 members and lasted an average of 90 minutes. Some critter-caused service disruptions impact just a handful of consumers, while others can

be much more “spectacular.” A single beaver-felled tree cut power to 991 consumers for more than two hours on a Sunday afternoon in November 2013. (So long, NFL football games!)

Last July, multiple Valley REC crews worked for eight hours to replace nine wood poles in Shirley Township, Huntingdon County, that were damaged by woodpeckers. The poles were part of a Valley REC transmission line that runs from a Penelec substation in Hill Valley to another Penelec substation at the rear of the Bonney Forge facility along Route 522, south of Mount Union. The damage was discovered in 2014 during an aerial patrol (an annual flyover by helicopter). The wooden poles were replaced with the co-op’s first fiberglass poles. It was not cost-effective to patch the old poles with resin and then keep checking them.

“That’s a major line,” Todd says. “It was something we had to be proactive with. They were nailed pretty good. We worked with Bonney Forge during their shut-down week and got all the work done in one day.”

Had the work not been done, there was a very real possibility that a



RUBBED DOWN: Something’s not quite right here! It looks like the work of a beaver, but actually it was the resident deer at Pine Tree Trophy Whitetails, LLC in Fulton County that rubbed this pole to the core. A pole this badly damaged poses a serious hazard.

heavy accumulation of ice could have snapped one of the brittle, hole-riddled poles, necessitating repair work in a hard-to-reach area in challenging weather. The co-op had to order special hardware for the fiberglass poles. Though the poles are somewhat more expensive than wood, they offer the advantage of being resistant to the drilling of woodpeckers, and they don't have the oversized butts of their wooden counterparts of the same height.

It's not just poles that draw the unwanted attention of critters. The fences and equipment at substations offer animals places to roost or hide. Because of contact incidents in the past, the co-op has posted a plastic owl at the Miller Substation in northern Huntingdon County in hopes of scaring away unwanted visitors.

"It's supposed to spook away the birds," says Huntingdon District Manager Randy Boonie. "This is the first place we've tried it, because we've had so many birds and a squirrel get in there. It deters the birds from roosting. The wind moves the wings."

Randy notes that "squirrel guards" are another defensive mechanism used by the co-op. The plastic pieces hinder animals from contacting energized equipment.

"We put them on every transformer," Randy says.

Believe it or not, deer can get in on the action, too. Two years ago, Valley REC crews replaced a pole at Pine Tree Trophy Whitetails, LLC, a deer farm near Harrisonville (Licking Creek Township, Fulton County), because deer had rubbed against it until there was nothing left but the core (see photo on opposite page).

"We replaced the pole and the member wanted that section to keep, to show people what the deer had done," Mark Booher, Shade Gap district manager recalls.

Another animal, this one many times smaller than a deer, is threatening co-op power lines with big damage. The emerald ash borer (EAB) has already killed innumerable ash trees across Pennsylvania. If these trees are within

range of power lines, they can cause outages when dead limbs become brittle and come crashing down.

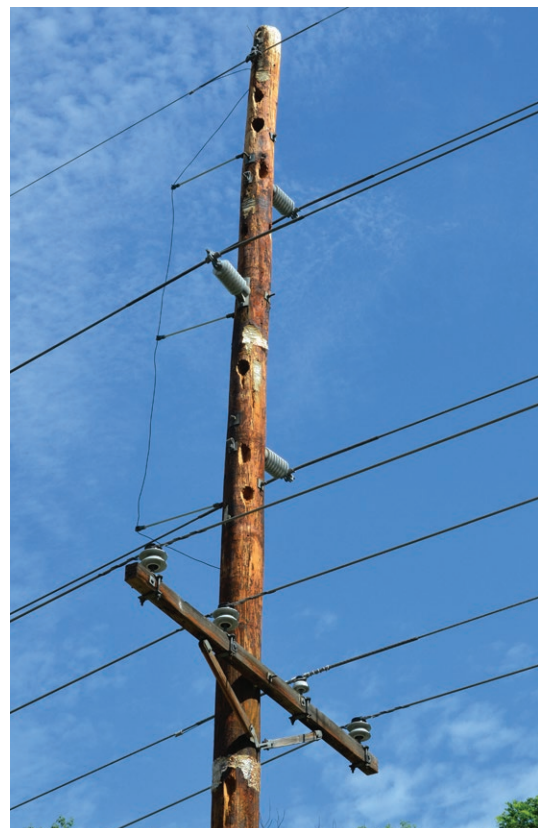
"We are not on the downhill side of this by any means; in fact, we are just now starting to see widespread infestation on much of our system,"



TAKING STOCK: Warehouse Materials Manager Billy Ayers checks the co-op's inventory of animal guards. The devices are placed above transformers along with a length of rubber sheath to prevent squirrels and birds from contacting energized lines.

says Kevin Detwiler, Valley REC's staff forester/arborist. "The number of dead and declining ash trees due to EAB has significantly increased each year. We are beginning to see the impact of the ash borer systemwide with certain areas being much worse than others."

Kevin says the areas served by the Miller, Dell and Reeds Gap substations are three of the worst-hit areas for EAB. In 2015, the co-op received approximately 40-45 percent more member calls concerning dead and declining



POLE HOLES: In Shirley Township, Huntingdon County, woodpecker damage was so significant that nine of the co-op's poles had to be replaced. **BELOW:** An "owl" perches at the corner of the Miller Substation to discourage birds from roosting on electrical equipment.

ash trees than in 2013 and 2014.

As the spring and summer season gets in full swing, the co-op's line crews will do their best to coexist with Mother Nature. Hopefully she'll get word to her critters to do the same. 🦉



2016 co-op golf tourney to benefit young farmer, high school senior

By Doug Roles
Manager of Member Services

THE 2016 Valley Rural Electric Golf Outing will benefit two Huntingdon County residents: a young man who was paralyzed last summer in a tragic swimming accident and a high school senior who battles an illness that makes it impossible for her to process food. Organized by Valley REC's Health & Wellness Committee, the tournament will be held June 30 at the Huntingdon Country Club.

Evan Yoder

Evan Yoder, 24, is the son of Ed and Carol Yoder of McAlevy's Fort. A 2010 Huntingdon Area High School (HAHS) graduate, Evan earned a degree in animal science from Penn State in 2014 and was helping to manage the family dairy farm when a freak accident July 25, 2015, changed his life.

Taking a break from making hay, he went to a family picnic at nearby Greenwood State Park. While running into the lake, he blacked out and belly flopped into the water, breaking vertebra in his neck. Doctors believe an undiagnosed heart condition caused the fall that left him unable to breathe on his own.

"A goal of mine is to become less reliant on the ventilator," Evan says. "The eventual goal is to not even need a ventilator."

In the fall of 2015, friends and other volunteers helped the Yoder family turn their two-car garage and woodshed into an apartment for Evan before his homecoming from the hospital. Evan was at Magee Rehabilitation Hospital, Philadelphia, from Aug. 11 to Nov. 18, 2015.

The apartment includes a large shower area specially designed for Evan. A hoist and rail system spans the room.

There are still periodic trips to the hospital for Evan. Pressure soreness is a concern. But the family is trying to stay positive.



Evan Yoder

"This community has been awesome," says Carol. "We've definitely seen the hand of God. There's just been an outpouring of love."

In addition to the home renovation work, neighbors have cut firewood, Couch's Country Store hosted a music festival and their church has supported them.

Ashton Stone

Ashton Stone, 17, of Huntingdon is the daughter of Chee and Christy Stone. The HAHS senior was diagnosed with gastroparesis two years ago. She has endured over 20 surgeries, including removal of much of her large intestine due to internal bleeding.

The disease requires lengthy hospital stays and makes it necessary for Ashton to use a feeding tube for all but the smallest liquid intake. A bout of illness earlier this year sent her to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

"Day to day, I struggle with chronic pain and nausea due to my condition, but have adapted and learned non-pharmaceutical ways to manage my pain," Ashton says. "It is hard to function as a normal teenager, but



Ashton Stone

normalcy is very important to me and my family."

Ashton says she participates in as many normal activities as she can, including spending time with family and friends and competing in sports. She has worked hard to maintain a 3.8 grade point average despite months in the hospital.

"My teachers have been very supportive and accommodating of my time in the hospital," she says.

"The local community and the school district have been so understanding," Chee adds. "Everybody has been so wonderful with her and the family. Her friends have been great throughout her illness."

Valley's tournament will help these two families with ongoing medical and related expenses. The 2016 event is the fifth golf tournament organized by Valley REC's Health & Wellness Committee, which has raised more than \$56,173 for charity since 2010.

Tee times for the tournament, a four-player scramble, are set for 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. Registration is from 6:30 to 8 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Lunch will be provided, and a putting contest will take place all day. A buffet dinner will be served at 5:30 p.m.

Donations of prizes or food items are welcome and teams are still forming. Those wishing to enter the event or to make a donation should contact committee chair Travis Kuhstos. He can be reached by phone at 814-386-3815 or by email at tkuhostos@valleyrec.com. 