

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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1-800-432-0680
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7 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

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7 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Outages & Emergencies
1-800-432-0680

Guest Column



Select trees that won't interfere with power lines

By Kevin Detwiler, Valley REC Utility Forester/Arborist

SEED CATALOGS have sprouted up in mailboxes already. Soon greenhouses and lawn and garden departments will be receiving shipments of plants, shrubs, and trees. They're all welcome signs of spring. And nothing says spring quite like getting a shovel into dirt and planting a tree.

A properly selected and planted tree can add beauty and energy efficiency to your landscape. A poorly selected and planted tree can become high maintenance, dangerous, and short-lived.

When considering which tree to purchase, it is wise to first consider the environment in which it will live. Soil type, sun exposure, climate and water availability are all examples of specific requirements for all tree species. One of the first considerations is the purpose of your tree. Will your tree be needed for shade, a windbreak or beauty? These considerations will affect what tree is suitable for you, and where it should be planted. Dense evergreens provide a good wind block, while leafy deciduous trees provide shade in the summer.


The next step is to decide where you will plant your tree. For a windbreak, plant trees to the north and northwest. For shade, plant trees to the east and west of your home. Remember that fast-growing trees are more brittle,

and more likely to be damaged in a storm. Plant these trees farther from your home to protect your home from damage. For information on how to properly plant a tree, please visit: <https://www.treesaregood.org/treeowner/plantingatree>. (International Society of Arboriculture)

Select planting locations that will not interfere with utility lines — in the air or underground — or power poles. Tall-growing trees with a mature height of greater than 40 feet should be planted 50 feet away to avoid future pruning. A mature height of less than 25 feet is recommended for trees planted near power lines. Keep in mind that trees should never be planted directly under power lines, near poles or too close to electrical equipment.

Power outages or interruptions occur when trees and branches come into contact with overhead lines. Electrical arcing and sparking from a wire to a nearby branch can cause fires.

Trees growing near power lines must be pruned to maintain a safe distance from the wires. If you have trees that are growing into power lines, give us a call. Never try to prune them yourself.

Before the tree planting begins, make sure to call 811. The 811 "Call Before You Dig" campaign is a free service that locates and marks your public underground utilities. 

Valley REC waives account fees through end of year in records update effort

By Doug Roles

Vice President of Member Services

VALLEY REC members whose account information doesn't match their living situations — either due to marriage, divorce or other situations — will want to take advantage of the co-op's offer to waive fees for account changes through the end of the year.

Valley is waiving fees to encourage members to make necessary changes and help the co-op have accurate account information. The housekeeping push will help ensure members have no trouble cashing patronage capital checks in the future if they move from Valley's lines.

"We are temporarily waiving fees, through the end of 2021," says Valley REC President & CEO Rich Bauer. "We're asking members who have an individual membership but are married to add the spouse's name. And we're asking for names to be removed from accounts where necessary or for new accounts to be created."

Valley's consumer service representatives encounter a number of situations where members should update account information. For example, if a member got married after activating an account but has never added the spouse's name, the name can now be added without payment of the \$25 fee. Likewise, the co-op is waiving the \$25 fee normally required for a name to be removed from an account, such as in the case of a member divorcing.

Couples who don't have a joint account run the risk of a surviving non-member spouse not being able to cash capital credits checks after the account becomes inactive. When members move from Valley's lines, they often are still owed capital credits returns for several years. If the husband or wife who had only his or her name on what should have been a joint account passes away, the co-op cannot change the name on the check to that

of the surviving spouse.

"We want to make people aware that in the future they could have trouble cashing capital credits," Bauer explains. "We want to make sure our former members can use that money down the road."

For a situation in which one spouse in a joint membership has died, the co-op is asking that the surviving spouse provide a death certificate. The joint account will then be changed to an individual account. The accrued capital credits will follow the new account. If the change is made by the end of 2021, there will be no fee.

Another problematic scenario is when adult children of a deceased member continue receiving service under the deceased member's account. That son or daughter may be paying the bill, but the capital credits are still accruing under the deceased parent's name. The capital credits will continue to be credited to the December bill, so the payer does receive the benefit. However, should the consumer move from Valley's lines, the co-op will not be able to send a capital credits check in the now-former payer's name.

In many instances, checks to deceased former members are returned to the co-op and the funds are earmarked as unclaimed capital credits and used in Valley's Community Service Grant Program. While the funds are put to good use — assisting members who are facing a hardship or assisting civic groups — the co-op would prefer, for accounting reasons, to know that an estate has been closed.

A son or daughter in the above situation may now open a new account without the possibility of having to pay a \$200 security deposit. Normally, members opening a new account at an existing location must pay the deposit if they've refused a credit check or if they have poor credit. The decision not to charge the security deposit in such cases

was made since the previous account holder was a family member at the same property and had either made a deposit or passed a credit check. Again, waiving of this fee is through the end of the year.

Members who had a joint account and have divorced and moved from Valley's lines should determine which spouse will receive the capital credits check. If one of the divorcing spouses remains in the home served by Valley REC, and the account remains open, the capital credits will continue to be applied as a credit on the December statement for that service location.

As always, the co-op is also asking members to provide new information for a change of phone number. Members who know their account contains outdated information or who have questions about their accounts should call 800-432-0680. ☀

2021 Annual Meeting

Drive-thru event at the
Huntingdon County Fairgrounds

4-7 p.m., Friday, April 9

Elections - Districts 2, 4 & 6

Due to ongoing COVID-19
restrictions on gatherings, Valley
REC's 2021 annual meeting
will follow a drive-thru format.

Members can arrive at the
fairgrounds anytime from 4-7 p.m.
Participants will receive a ballot, an
annual report and a \$25 bill credit.

A drawing will be held after the
event for door prizes. The winners
of co-op gift certificates (1 - \$200
& 6 - \$100) will be notified the
week following the meeting.

The three candidates running for
election are listed on Page 12d.

\$25 OFF YOUR ELECTRIC BILL!

A new year, a new look: Co-op upgrades website

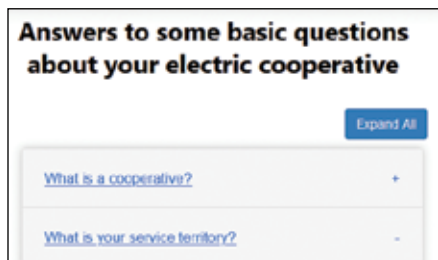
By John H. Bookwalter Jr.
Special Projects Coordinator

OUT WITH the old, in with the new. So goes the adage, and so it was with Valley Rural Electric Cooperative's website (valleyrec.com). In mid-January, Valley launched a new look for its online presence.

Although the previous design, which won the best website award from the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association in 2013 and 2020, had been modified and refined since debuting in July 2013, it has been long overdue for an upgrade. Web design experts recommend refreshing a website every two to four years.

As mobile devices like smartphones and tablet computers proliferated, our previous site became frustrating for mobile users. When Co-op Web Builder (CWB), the website design and hosting service offered as part of Valley's Touchstone Energy® membership, announced early last year it would end support for previous versions of its software at the end of 2021, we decided to switch to the newest version well before the last-minute rush.

The most significant change to our



site is its responsive design. The website can detect the size of the screen or window in which it is being viewed and will shift or resize the content to better fit the viewing area. This mobile-friendly responsive nature reduces the need to zoom in or zoom out to see various parts of the webpage on a phone or tablet.

Users of mobile devices also experience frustration trying to use the traditional navigation menu of a website. In the upper right of the

header area, we now have a mobile menu icon, also known as a hamburger button because its three stacked horizontal lines resemble the sandwich. Tapping or clicking this menu button causes a vertical menu to slide out for mobile-friendly navigation. Tapping or clicking outside the menu causes it to hide again.

The face of our website is noticeably different. It has a lighter appearance with more white space. Brighter hues of complementary azure and orange with a gray footer convey a friendly, inviting, open, reliable communication setting. A large, simple font with extra vertical spacing makes lines of text easier to read. And more graphics and images provide visual variety and replace those thousand words a picture is worth.

Having been annoyed ourselves when trying to find something on an updated website, we have kept the general layout and organization from our previous design. Our phone numbers and offices hours are in the header of each page. Should a responsive shift hide that part of the header, this important information also appears at the bottom of each page. The navigation menu has the same basic layout with mostly the same topics and subtopics. Much of the old content is present on the new site, and we have added some new pages like the Educational Programs page. If you cannot find what you want, a search box in the header sits ready to help.

Award judges have praised our previous site for being easy to use with important and timely information easily available. Our new design strives to maintain those qualities. Prominent buttons across the top provide



EVEN BETTER: Valley REC's new website keeps the best features from the previous version but includes upgrades that make site navigation more intuitive. Accordion-style presentation of information, such as in the screenshot below, allow site visitors to see lists of topics and then click to see more information.

one-touch access to important pages or processes. Additional buttons in the photo box on the homepage help guide you to our contact and offices pages. Also on the homepage you will find our Facebook feed; our news and events listing, now called Recent Posts; and brief information about the co-op in text, graphic, and video formats.

The new design also implements features unavailable in earlier versions of CWB. Accordion lists, which expand and collapse like an accordion, turn long streams of content into shorter, vertically stacked blocks that can be revealed and hidden as the reader wishes. Tabbed sections, like file folder or card file tabs, perform a similar task but display the topics horizontally across the page. Media boxes replace long lists of lifeless links with images and brief descriptions about the linked pages. A user-controlled pop-up box displays our welcome video. And a tap or click on the large Back to Top button at the bottom of every page quickly returns you to the top.

We hope you appreciate the changes and find our website easier to view and use. We will continue to tweak, refine and add to the design. If you have any questions, suggestions or comments, please contact our webmaster by email at webmaster@valleyrec.com or by phone at 800-432-0680, extension 1630. 🌞

2021 Valley REC board candidates

DISTRICT 2

A 1978 graduate of Kishacoquillas High School, Jim Stauffer owns and operates a 60-acre dairy farm with a herd of 150 milking cows and 90 replacement heifers. He farms a total of 170 acres and ships his milk through Dairy Farms of America Cooperative.

Jim was employed for 10 years as manager of Brookland Mills, a retail livestock feed and fuel oil delivery service in McVeytown. Prior to that time, he worked as a truck driver for a fertilizer plant in the Belleville area.

Jim and his wife, Carol, attend Ferguson Valley Brethren in Christ Church.

The couple has three married children, twins Ben and Brittney, and their younger sibling, Josh, and six grandchildren. The Stauffers have been married for 40 years.

A native of Belleville, Jim has been a member of Valley REC since 1993 and has served on the co-op board of directors since 1997. He held the office of vice chairman for two years and currently serves as chairman of the board. He also serves as Valley's director on the Allegheny Electric Cooperative Board. Jim's name will appear on the ballot for District 2.



James Stauffer
175 Aultz Lane
McVeytown, PA 17051

DISTRICT 4

Joanne Whitsel has been a Valley REC member since 1971. She retired from serving as director of the Crossroads Pregnancy Center, a faith-based and life-affirming service with offices in Huntingdon, Mifflin, and Juniata counties.

She also served as jury commissioner for the Huntingdon County Court of Common Pleas for 14 years. For the past seven years, she has served the court as tipstaff. Joanne graduated from Captain Jack (now Mount Union Area) High School in 1964, then completed a cosmetology program at Penn State Beauty Academy, State College. She worked as a self-employed hairdresser for 20 years.

A native of Wayne Township, Mifflin County, she likes to stay active and, when time permits, enjoys painting and drawing. Five years ago, Joanne and her sister started an antique consignment business. They have a booth at the Duncansville Antique Depot, Blair County.

Joanne is a member of Cornelius Chapel Methodist Church and also attends Beech Run Brethren Church, both in Hares Valley. Joanne enjoys spending time with her extended family. She and her late husband, Nelson, have three grown children, Jonelle, Nathan, and Jonathan.

Since joining the board of directors in 2015, Joanne has earned the Credentialed Cooperative Director, Board Leadership Certificate, and most recently Director Gold certification, the highest honor for any director. Joanne completed these credits through the educational opportunities presented by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Joanne's name will appear on the ballot for District 4.



Joanne Whitsel
7925 Windy Summit Lane
Mapleton Depot, PA 17052

DISTRICT 6

Leroy Barnes has successfully operated his family's dairy farm in partnership with his brother, Barry, since 1968. They currently milk 220 Holsteins and raise corn and alfalfa on approximately 700 acres of ground.

A 1966 graduate of Claysburg-Kimmel High School, Leroy holds an associate degree in computer management from the ICM School of Business in Pittsburgh.

Leroy is a member of the Mount Hope United Church of Christ in Blue Knob. He is a former member of the Blue Knob Fire Company and served three years as a director for Long's Dairy, a milk marketing cooperative in Tyrone. He currently serves as a director on the Allied Milk Producers board.

In his free time, Leroy enjoys hunting.

Leroy has three grown children and six grandchildren. A native of Blue Knob, Leroy has been a member of Valley REC for more than 33 years. He has served on the co-op board for 21 years, including as vice chairman, and is currently the co-op's representative on the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association board.

Leroy's name will appear on the ballot for District 6.



Leroy Barnes
445 Sarah Drive
Portage, PA 15946