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Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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Guest Column



Getting the message on meaningful connections

By Doug Roles, *Vice President of Member Services*

A FEW years ago — well, maybe more than a few — my wife and I got our first phone that included a built-in answering machine. Remember those? I think they're still around, but I'd bet their residential use is wearing as thin as a cassette tape due to digital mobile devices.

At the time, though, that household technology was a big leap forward over the clunkier, stand-alone machines that actually did use cassette tapes to record messages many years before everyone began texting and instant messaging.

It was exciting to see the little red light flashing, which meant someone had left you a message. This was before every other phone call to a landline was coming from telemarketers. I don't recall that we ever received a lot of messages. In fact, on more than one occasion, I came home from work, saw the light flashing and excitedly hit the playback button only to hear me reminding myself to run some errand.

Calling myself was actually a pretty handy method for not forgetting an important task, but it's also a reminder that there was a time when we went about our days and were not "connected" 24/7. We managed just fine, but that lifestyle is going by the wayside.

Anne Prince, who writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, noted recently that we are so connected through our smartphones and other devices that we run the risk

of disconnecting from family and our community.


"Truly disconnecting from devices can be tough," Anne wrote, "because our phones are so much more now — from cameras and calendars to social media connections."

It's especially difficult, Anne stated, for our kids.

There's nothing inherently wrong with computers, gaming devices, tablets and cellphones. But I agree with Anne that there's great value in temporarily disconnecting from devices to reconnect with people.

"For kids, time away from the screen is time to be outside with other children, connecting with nature and others in a way that a virtual experience simply does not allow," Anne stated. "They can experience life in the moment."

She adds that adults can also find meaningful opportunities to spend time with the kids when we *all* unplug. From board games and craft projects to playing outdoors, there are many ways we can have some non-digital family fun, especially in this rural area so richly blessed with outdoor recreation and community groups and activities.

Let's encourage youngsters and each other to step away from the screens a little each day. Certainly, social media can help build online communities, but there's no substitute for in-person interaction with family and neighbors, and that's a flashing red message we can all get excited about. 

Annual Valley REC golf tournament benefits two local families

By Doug Roles

Vice President of Member Services

AFTER holding a scaled-down event last year due to COVID-19, Valley Rural Electric's Annual Benefit Golf Outing came back in full swing for 2021. The co-op closed its corporate office and all three district offices on Thursday, Aug. 12, as employees joined golfers and other supporters for a day at the Huntingdon Country Club in support of two area families.

This year's beneficiaries are Hannah Johns of Huntingdon, an infant with a congenital heart condition, and River Troutman of Hopewell, a Bedford County teen battling lymphoma. The benefit tournament brings together golfers and sponsors from across central Pennsylvania and beyond each year for a good cause. The event is normally held in June.

"We are very happy to be back to a normal tournament, even though we pushed it back two months because COVID-19 impacted the start of our planning process," Valley REC President & CEO Rich Bauer says. "We're truly grateful for all the support of our sponsors and donors and wish River and Hannah and their families all the best."

The cooperative's 10th annual golf event raised approximately \$30,000. The recipients will split the proceeds after expenses. Valley's golf outing has raised nearly \$240,000 to date.

This year's tournament saw the return of a morning and afternoon flight of golfers in a shotgun-start best ball scramble. The morning group teed off at 8 a.m. while the afternoon flight began play at 1 p.m. The winning team for the morning flight was the Creative Pultrusions team from Alum Bank, Bedford County. Its golfers were Jeremy Mostoller, Terry Shank, Brandon Weyant and Tim Winegardner. The afternoon flight winning team was the



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

A HELPING HAND: Valley REC President & CEO Rich Bauer, right, joins the Troutman and Johns families for a photo at the Huntingdon Country Club. River Troutman, second from left, is a junior at Northern Bedford High School and is winning his fight against lymphoma. He is the son of Dana and Kandy Troutman of Everett. Hannah Johns is an infant from Huntingdon who has a congenital heart condition. She is the daughter of Tyler and Jamie Johns and has a brother, Matthew, age 3.

Sussex Rural Electric team, represented by Ben Gorman, Valley REC's vice president of engineering and technology, and his son, Colin, both of Johnston; and Chandler Keefer and Matt Keefer, both of Greensburg.

The morning winning team shot a 58 and the afternoon's winners shot a 57. Players were able to purchase "cheats" — such as an extra swing or moving a ball a set distance closer to the cup — as part of the fundraiser event, which included a silent auction of a wide variety of donated items.

Both beneficiaries are doing well, although they are still undergoing treatment. Hannah is the daughter of Tyler and Jamie Johns of Huntingdon. She was born in October 2020 with total anomalous pulmonary venous return (TAPVR), a congenital birth defect of the heart that prevents oxygen-rich blood from returning to the left side of

the heart from the lungs. Hannah had surgery in Pittsburgh shortly after birth. She will require follow-up medical care for her heart and for Cat Eye Syndrome, a disorder in which individuals have four copies of their 22nd chromosome. Children with this syndrome can have a range of health challenges, including hearing difficulty, cleft palate, vision and cardiac problems.

"Hannah is doing well," Tyler says. "She did get diagnosed with a new syndrome, Duane's Syndrome, which affects the focus of her right eye."

The Johns are hopeful the condition, which impedes horizontal eye movement, will not require surgery. Additionally, Hannah will be evaluated in the spring to see if she requires surgery on her vocal cords.

"From a heart standpoint, she continues to be just fine," Jamie adds.

The Johns did not know Hannah

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had any health problems until she was born. After delivery at UPMC Altoona, Hannah's oxygen levels were dropping, and the attending physician thought he detected a heart murmur. An echocardiogram was performed and she was immediately taken by helicopter to Pittsburgh.

The family had to stay in Pittsburgh for several weeks and work through the complexities of travel, meals and which parent would be with their son,

Matthew, now 3. Tyler is a surgical nurse who works in dermatology for Penn State Health. Jamie is a fifth-grade teacher in the Mount Union Area School District.

The second beneficiary, River Troutman, is a junior at Northern Bedford High School and is the son of Dana and Kandy Troutman of Hopewell. He is an active teen who enjoys sports and fishing and plans to play the saxophone in the high school band this

year. On March 29, 2020, after running up a set of steps at home, River got very dizzy and was short of breath. On April 1, 2020, River was diagnosed with T-cell lymphoblastic lymphoma, a rare and aggressive form of cancer that begins in the center part of the chest. River has had multiple stays at UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh. He will continue maintenance chemotherapy through the summer of

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Golf

SILENT AUCTION: Shade Gap District Manager Brandon Clemens, left, and Huntingdon District journeyman lineman Eric Yingling browse silent auction items at the Huntingdon Country Club at the start of Valley REC's 2021 Annual Benefit Golf Outing.



2022 but is doing very well.

"I just went with the flow," River says of his approach to his diagnosis. "There was really nothing else I could do about it. I'm doing pretty good now."

Kandy is an elementary math specialist for Northern Bedford School District. Dana owns and operates the popular Kountry Kettle Restaurant & Catering in Hopewell. In the better-weather months, the family also operates the American Kream Soft Serve in Hopewell. River has a brother, Lake, in fifth grade, and a brother, Brook, who recently completed a physical therapy course of study at Allegheny College of Maryland.

Members of both families supported the tournament and had an opportunity to meet Valley REC employees and golfers. A committee comprised of Valley REC employees from the co-op's corporate and district offices selects tournament beneficiaries each year and plans the golf outing. All employees lend a hand in lining up sponsorships and donations or help with tournament activities on the day of the event.

"Cancer and other serious illnesses impact so many families, regardless of their backgrounds," Bauer says. "Our event provides one way for people to be involved and show support for community members facing a tough time."

Valley REC's previous tournaments have benefited two high school classmates battling cancer; an adult who sustained serious injuries in a car accident; infants and toddlers with congenital conditions; a high school senior with a life-altering digestive disorder; and a young man who was paralyzed in a swimming accident. Valley REC plans to host its next tournament in the fourth week of June next year. 🌞



MORNING WINNERS: The Creative Pultrusions team from Alum Bank, Bedford County, won the morning flight. Team members were, from left: Jeremy Mostoller, Terry Shank, Tim Winegardner and Brandon Weyant.

AFTERNOON WINNERS: The winning team of the afternoon flight was sponsored by Sussex Rural Electric Cooperative of New Jersey. Representing the team were, from left: Ben Gorman, Valley REC's vice president of engineering and technology, and his son, Colin, both of Johnston; and Chandler Keefer and Matt Keefer, both of Greensburg.

