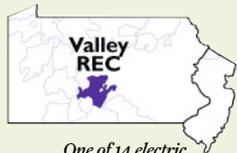


Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

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GUEST COLUMN

Co-op website undergoes redesign

BY JOHN H. BOOKWALTER, JR.
Special Projects Coordinator

IN MID-JULY, Valley Rural Electric's website received a new home. Originally housed internally, the hosting (computer location) of the cooperative's website shifted to Co-opWebBuilder, a service offered as part of Valley's Touchstone Energy membership. Although the website address remains www.valleyrec.com, the move required many changes to the site.

one of the listed page names to view the page.

A third way to reach E-Bill is via the top navigation menu. Located in the upper right corner, this abbreviated menu provides one-click access to specific pages.

Alert messages now appear in a red-bound gray box below the top navigation menu. When there are important messages from the co-op, they will scroll across the alert box. Otherwise, the box will not appear.

The News & Events box now appears in the right sidebar of the new design. Listed here are links to news items of a more lasting duration. Clicking a headline in the News & Events box displays the beginning of the full article.

All content from our old site is present on the new site. There are even some new pages, including many of those under the Safety topic. Provided by Touchstone Energy,



One of the most noticeable changes is the home page. A photo slide show appears prominently near the top. We plan to feature different images in this area throughout the year, and the photos can link to other pages in the site.

Along the bottom right of the slide show is the new My Account button. Clicking it provides access to the co-op's E-Bill program, which allows members to view and pay their bills online. Additional buttons may be added in the future.

Members can also access online bill payment by using the new drop-down main menu along the top of the slide show. The website's pages are grouped into topics. Mousing over each topic reveals a drop-down list of pages. Click

these safety pages give valuable tips on electrical safety and advice on preparing for a storm and possible power outages.

Not sure where something is on our website? The white oval search box near the top of any page can help. Type a word or some words about a topic in the box and press the Enter key. The Search page will display the results of the search.

Valley REC's website will continue to evolve over the coming months. Possible additions include a customized version for mobile devices and web-based forms that can be completed online. Please check out the new design and send any comments or suggestions to webmaster@valleyrec.com. 

Chasing dreams & checkered flags

Williamsburg thrill seeker pursued racing glory on NASCAR's dirt tracks

BY DOUG ROLES
Director of Member Services



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

EARLY RACER: Valley REC member Leon Norris of Williamsburg displays his 'Maude Special' racing jacket that dates to NASCAR's beginnings. The plaques behind him are gifts from racing great Mario Andretti, who knows Norris from the two times they raced each other.

LEON NORRIS of Williamsburg has made his way in life by partnering his enthusiasm with any opportunities that came along. He and his wife, Joyce, operated a logging company for more than a decade, and owned and operated a local tavern, "Leon's Place," for a few years. He's worked construction and heavy equipment in several states and has done all kinds of work between those jobs.

"I have to be doing something all the time," says the 85-year-old, who still does some logging on his acreage.

He once took up flying and has done some traveling. But he's never lived life quite so intensely as when he was a young man involved with the then-young, and somewhat reckless, sport of stock car racing.

Like so many things in life, Norris' start in racing was not planned. After graduating from Williamsburg High School in 1945 and serving in the Navy, he was working in Warren, Pa., in 1948 when he went to Dicky-Ben Speedway with some friends. They had fixed up a 1934 Ford to enter in a race. But his friends did not want to drive it. So, true to his nature, Leon jumped in. His first time on a race track was the heat (qualifying round) preceding the race. He won the heat but crashed in the feature.

"It was a jalopy," he recalls. "I was going around a turn and my right front wheel came off. I was probably going about 60 miles per hour and I was hit by one car and then another. That kept me spinning."

Norris' next time behind the wheel also came by chance. He was living in a room at the Warren YMCA when he found steady work for the winter, plastering an apartment building. He was still in the area that spring when racing season began.

At the track, as an observer, he saw a driver wreck a car owned by Joe Cassamento, whose family owned a fruit market in Warren. Joe had a fast 1932 Ford Model B but his two drivers had wrecked the car a total of three times, including the night Nor-

ris attended the race. Norris said to no one in particular that he could drive the car better. He happened to be standing next to Joe's brother, who asked him in broken English to repeat what he'd just said. Norris did and word got back to Joe, who took it to mean that he had a new driver.

"That was the first 'race car' I ever drove," Norris recalls.

He was to drive the car the following Sunday and was told by Cassamento to just drive it the way that felt right to him.

"I had that thing flying," he says. "It just felt like part of me."

He won his heat, then took third in the race. Norris remembers Cassamento was so happy he ran out to the track and jumped on the hood of the car. Norris still has a photo of Cassamento straddling the fenders.

Norris was hooked and began racing at sand and dirt tracks across Pennsylvania and then up and down the coast. He juggled NASCAR-sponsored events with non-NASCAR events. Tracks in Buffalo and Erie had a NASCAR representative; Dicky-Ben did not. That caused some contention because NASCAR didn't want drivers to participate in non-sanctioned events, but drivers needed the money and would race where the purse was highest.

"In the late '40s and early '50s, most real racers raced modifieds, which were faster; more powerful and had more frequent races and paid more," says Roland Via, webmaster of the Legends of NASCAR website. "NASCAR had Strictly Stocks and the early Grand Nationals, which only raced about once per week and simply were not the fast cars of the day."

"I find this rare breed of driver from those days was a real daredevil ... in what was essentially a 'run what you bring' class. Safety was not as paramount as speed, and they did not have power steering or brakes and all the modern conveniences. They truly defined racing for the future



ROUGH AND TUMBLE: A young boy attending a race in 1948 at Dicky-Ben Speedway in Warren, Pa., snaps this photo of Leon Norris' car spinning on its nose. The picture, from one of the lad's first forays into photography, made the cover of a racing magazine in the Midwest. The boy was paid \$150 and offered to split the money with Norris, who refused.

generations.”

The inaugural NASCAR season of 1948 featured modifieds exclusively. The “Strictly Stock” division, later known as the Winston Cup Series, then the Sprint Cup Series of today, came about in mid-1949.

A half a dozen times, Norris tried to qualify for NASCAR's big race — Daytona. He said luck was always against him on those time trials. One attempt saw him flip his car end over end seven times. Not qualifying was disappointing, but the trek back from Florida brought Norris his most memorable moment in racing.

Coming back through southeastern Pennsylvania once in the early 1960s, Norris and his buddies stopped at a restaurant for some dinner enroute to Warren. When they came out, a local man was checking out their race car, a 1932 Hudson Hornet. He said they should enter the car at Nazareth speedway and said the man to beat there was a fellow by the name of Mario Andretti, who raced a 1934 Hornet.

Norris remembers watching Andretti in the heat and seeing that he was “running the curve pretty high on that track.” Norris says it took 12 laps of the feature for him to get through traffic and to catch up to Andretti. From there, he was able to keep pace and when Andretti dropped down to get around another car riding the high side of a turn, Norris “was able to zip through.”

Norris recalls Andretti was right on his tail for the next several laps, but he held on for the win as Andretti blew a tire on the final lap. Andretti considered his car a pretty good race car, Norris remembers, but says Andretti told him his (Norris') was a little better.

“He offered to buy it, but we weren't about to give up that Hudson because we were winning a lot of races with it,” Norris says. “I think we got \$300 for that race. Back then if you won \$100 in a feature, you were doing good. But you could stay at a motel or get a steak dinner for \$1.25.”

Norris says he and his crew talked with Andretti about tires and gears and Eski Deri camshafts into the early morning hours before leaving the track to spend the night at a friend's house. Andretti had three more weeks of racing at Nazareth before going back to the Indy car circuit. He asked Norris to make a return trip for a friendly rematch.

“He was really nice. He wanted to know if I could get back there to race,” Norris says. “He had been in the states about six years at the time and said I was quite a driver. That was quite an honor for me.”

FIRST LOVE: Norris stands next to one of his favorite cars, No. 129 PA, in Canfield, Ohio, circa 1950. It was the first race car he ever built. He paid a junkyard \$20 for it and raced in NASCAR's Modified Stock Class.

On Norris' return to Nazareth, he bested Andretti “by almost a full car length.” He remembers the competition not so much as a win or lose event but as a mutual love of racing.

Norris heard from Andretti a few years ago. A family member contacted Andretti's offices and sent some photos of Norris with a request that Andretti autograph them. Norris says he was told through the family member that Andretti remembers their meeting in Nazareth. The autographed photos now adorn a wall in the Norris home.

Norris says another highlight for him is being the first driver to get up to 100 mph on the front straightaway of Port Royal's track. He says in an early 1960s event, race officials thought he hit the speed and asked him to run a few laps to confirm it. He hit the speed on two of three laps, hitting nearly 110 in a 1940s Chevrolet with a fuel-injected 327 engine, one of the first fuel-injected motors.

According to Norris, a typical race in the late 1940s was 10 to 20 cars. Changes in racing include larger tracks and pit areas, more cars in the race and much more emphasis on safety. Norris remembers the only safety rules being that the gas tank had to be in the back of the car and that the battery had to be secured. Restrictions on cars were looser, but if a driver started winning too often, race officials would tear down the engine to make sure the team hadn't bored out the motor beyond what was permitted. Officials took Leon's car apart on two occasions and his team had to do the reassembly work. But they didn't mind — much. They were winning.

In 1949, Norris' team was able to have a backup car and began racing several nights a week. One season he had a Chevrolet sponsored by Goode Chevrolet of Indiana, Pa. He said the car was geared low and was

(continues on page 14d)



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Staking engineer enjoys 'blessings of retirement'

MORNING COFFEE on the back porch with his wife, Sandy, is one of the perks Tim Cisney enjoys most since retiring from Valley Rural Electric Cooperative in January. Tim worked for the co-op as a staking engineer for 27 years.

His responsibilities included laying out new lines and meeting new members to arrange service connections. Though he enjoyed his working years, Tim thinks retirement is better.

"There's nothing like it. Retirement's wonderful," he says.

Tim is a 1973 graduate of Southern Huntingdon County High School. He attended Thaddeus Stevens Trade School (now Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology) from 1973-75, graduating first in his auto mechanics class. Tim played basketball for the school both years he attended.

Prior to coming on board with Valley REC, Tim had done plenty of work in carpentry and construction, including work with the family construction business, Cisney & O'Donnell. He had also worked as a maintenance supervisor at Woodland Retirement Center in Orbisonia.

Tim came to work for the co-op in September 1987. His favorite part of the job was working with members.

"I'm a people person. I always enjoyed meeting different people," he says.

Tim has always kept busy. He and Sandy ran a craft store of primitive products from part of their Rockhill home for 12 years while they also renovated and rented the home next door. During his working years, they completed several home-improvement projects, eventually creating a screened-in porch that overlooks a swimming pool and a meticulously-kept back yard.

The home improvements also created more space for family gatherings. The Cisneys have three grown children and seven grandchildren.

Tim sees his retirement as a chance to share more of his time

with Sandy, who has cut back to working two days a week in her in-home beauty shop, where their daughter also works. During his working years, there were many times when Tim had to leave home, often in the worst weather, to help restore service to members, leaving Sandy to handle things at the house.

"That was always a big concern of mine," he says.

He and Sandy have been married for 38 years.

They're enjoying having more time not only to work around the house but to reach out to neighbors.

"I like to work on my yard and flowers and keep my property looking good. And we help out at the church, Fairview Evangelical Church. I believe in helping people," Tim says.

Tim feels blessed to have worked for Valley.

"It's a bunch of good people. I have three things to credit my retirement to," Tim says, "the Lord, my wife and family, and Valley Rural Electric. We're really content and satisfied."

Tim says he initially considered taking on various part-time jobs or projects, but says for now he's happy to enjoy some well-deserved downtime.

"The guys haven't forgotten about me. They blow the horn on the truck when they go by at 3 a.m.," he says. "I told the guys 'I'm not going to get out of bed and help you but I'll say a prayer for you.'"



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

NOW RETIRED: Tim and Sandy Cisney spend some time together in the back yard of their home in Rockhill, Huntingdon County. Tim retired from Valley REC in January.

CHASING DREAMS

(continued from page 14c)

great in the corners of quarter-mile tracks. He won often with it that summer in Clarion and Erie and got to race against NASCAR pioneers Mike Little, Pappy Hough and Mike Klapak, often besting them.

Norris tells of plenty of ups and downs to his 16 years in racing. Money was always tight. Cars needed repairs and there was the danger inherent in the sport.

Time at the track had its share of hijinks, too. At a Kittanning racetrack, a wreck in the final heat delayed the start of the feature race as the track was repaired. Norris recalls a fellow driver, Dick Linder, told NASCAR regional official Ralph Quarterson that he and Norris would entertain the crowd. They did, Norris says, by having Linder drive Norris' car around the track while Norris held a headstand on the hood.

"He was the only one I trusted to drive the car while I did that trick," says Norris.

Sadly, Linder died in 1959 in a crash at a

Trenton, N.J., speedway. Norris says he got through his racing career mostly unscathed, although he has some arthritis in his neck, possibly from the strain put on him during races. A head-on collision into a wall in Buffalo, N.Y. caused him to lose some teeth.

"I raced my car the next night," he says. "It was a fast, exciting life. I never drank. I never smoked. But my buddies did get me in some trouble."

While racing had its rough-and-tumble aspects, Norris says he was once able to extend the long arm of the law. He was driving his team's 1947 Ford to a track in Erie and was running late for the race. When he hit a four-lane stretch of highway, there was little traffic and a lot of road. Norris figures he was going about 100 mph when he passed the state trooper. The trooper figured Norris was headed to Erie and was waiting for him when he came off the track at the end of the race. Leon recalls the trooper asked him if he could arrive in Erie a bit early the next week, because the

captain wanted to see him. Norris met with the captain and agreed to keep his speed down. He also agreed to rent the race car to the force for a few weeks. And the police caught 67 speeders in the next couple of weeks by having a faster car.

Norris follows NASCAR and was a Dale Earnhardt fan because of a meeting with Ralph Earnhardt, Dale's father. Norris likes watching races on TV but believes there are too many commercials and too much money in what used to be a hobby sport.

"To get into NASCAR today would be almost impossible for the normal person," Norris says. "There's so much money involved now. It's unbelievable."

Leon said the biggest reason he got out of racing was the difficulty in getting sponsors and the cost to keep a car in racing shape. To this day, he's grateful for companies such as Pennzoil and Montgomery Ward for the donations of oil and tires that kept him on the track while he chased racing glory. 🌞