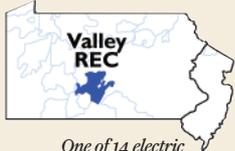


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FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

'The Most Wonderful Time of the Year'



by Rich Bauer
President & CEO

MOST PEOPLE associate Christmas with being the most wonderful time of the year, but I am sure many parents out there rate the end of August or the beginning of September as a close second. The reason for this is the start of the new school year. For many people, when the kids go back to school, normalcy returns to the family. A

routine schedule is set up and for the next nine months, barring holidays, we stay in that pattern. For many parents with younger children, the school year provides relief from the cost of daycare or babysitter fees that pile up over the summer months.

This time of year also provides local entertainment in the form of the county fair. Having our office directly across from the Huntingdon County Fairgrounds is a true blessing because we get to see so many people support this annual event. I am amazed at the number of people the fair draws every day. This is also the time when young people get to show off their past year's hard work by showing their livestock and then selling their animals, just to begin the process all over again.

This year at the fairs in Huntingdon and Juniata counties, we gave away glow sticks and light-up bouncy balls to the kids. The glow sticks were a big hit with most kids wearing them around their neck. It was really neat to see all the glowing sticks at night walking the midway. These glow sticks double as a safety light to protect your children if they are out at dusk. One of the uses that I have found for my glow sticks comes at the end of October. Once you have carved that Halloween pumpkin, put the glow stick in the pumpkin

instead of a candle. The multi-colored light will make your jack-o-lantern stand out from all the others.

September is the kickoff for local high school sporting events that so many people love to attend. Fall is in the air, and the nights are cool and the days are still warm, but the oppressive humidity is gone. Football is big in our area, and many people spend their Friday nights under the lights throughout the county rooting on their local high schools. On Saturday, many of us are glued to the TV or radio listening to our favorite college team play, and then it is on to Sunday to watch the Steelers play.

For me, as well as numerous others, the beginning of September is the time to bring the archery equipment out of storage. As the leaves are just beginning to change colors, hunters are beginning to get anxious for the season to start. A constant barrage of arrows is launched at foam targets as we hone our skills for the upcoming archery season.

September is a very busy time at your cooperative. Many people are seeing the change in the weather and working to get that home or garage built before the snow flies. This push to get their buildings done gives us a rush of new service connections that keeps us busy through November. The fall is also our planning stage for the following year. Next year's budget is created for all the work that we plan to do in 2016.

Our area provides so many unique opportunities and this time of year is one of those. The transformation from summer to fall affects every one of us in numerous ways, and our habits and workload change with the seasons. Please take the time to enjoy the season and take advantage of what our area has to offer. As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me. Take care and God bless. 

A cut above

New barber school offers career training in style

BY DOUG ROLES
Manager of Member Services

THE ONLY barber school between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg has set up shop on Valley REC lines, in the business park adjacent to the co-op's corporate office. Martin's Barber School, which marks its one-year anniversary next month, draws students from across Valley territory and beyond and gives them the opportunity to learn a trade, and perhaps start their own business.

Owner Joe Martin says he started the school to share his craft with students whose experience ranges from already licensed cosmetologists to those who haven't handled a pair of scissors since kindergarten and craft paper. To open his school, he had to make the tough decision to close the successful barbershop he had operated for eight years in Bellwood, Blair County.

"I always liked the idea of a barber school; you're helping students, but you're also providing a service to the community in the way of cheap, student haircuts," Joe says. "When you have a dream, it's kind of like 'someday.' Once I realized that I was close to having enough time to get my teaching license, the idea started to become more of a reality. It felt like the next step."

Joe opened the school on Oct. 15, 2014. He had hoped to have at least three students for a start, but had five for the first week of classes and now has nine in the program.

The nine-month, 1,250-hour course is structured with an hour of class time each day and then six hours of clinic time. Subjects include honing and stropping, shaving, haircutting and styling, coloring, hygiene, bacteriology, professional ethics, and state regulations.

Licensed cosmetologists take a six-month (695-hour) course to attain their barber's license. Part-time students will complete the course in 13 to 15 months. Evening classes are available. Upon graduating, students receive a certificate of completion and are eligible to take the state barber exam.

"Students can come in and pick right up," Joe says. "Every month we can start new students."

Joe's family and the military played a part in the unfolding of his career. As one of nine children, his childhood haircuts were done at home to help the family budget.

"Dad always cut our hair," Joe recalls. "With six boys, he wasn't taking us all to the barbershop."

But as the boys reached their teen years, they became more particular about their appearance and began giving each other haircuts.

"We started to worry about what girls thought," Joe admits.

After graduating from Calvary Christian Academy, Huntingdon, in 2001, Joe attended Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) with a goal of a culinary arts degree, but had his studies interrupted when his Army National Guard unit was mobilized



CUTTING EDGE: Joe Martin, who opened Martin's Barber School near Huntingdon a year ago, wants to help aspiring cutters prepare for a career that often includes running your own business.

to Kosovo for a peacekeeping mission in 2003-04. As often happens in the military, anyone with some experience with scissors and clippers got asked to cut hair in the barracks.

"I cut a lot of hair in Kosovo," Joe says.

After returning from Kosovo in July 2004, he began nine months of barber school at Barber Styling Institute of Camp Hill. But in January 2005, he volunteered to deploy to Iraq with five other soldiers from his company.

In Iraq, a company commander wanted a barbershop set up and knew that Joe was the one for the job. The commander gave Joe a space in the company building. An office chair welded to a .50 caliber machine gun base completed the shop.

The end of the deployment meant new beginnings for Joe. When he returned from Iraq in July 2006, he completed barber school, married a barber school classmate and set up shop in Bellwood, in a building that had housed a barbershop since 1953.

"It had been closed for several years, after the previous owner died," Joe says. "It was a staple of that town."

Joe operated his barbershop there from December 2006 to



ABOVE: Martin's Barber School is located along Fairgrounds Road near Huntingdon. **AT RIGHT:** Graduate Sam Gosa offers the class tips on taking the practical exam. **BELOW:** Alvin Shaffer of Alexandria, Huntingdon County, checks his haircut by student Brian Dodson of Lilly, Cambria County, as Joe Martin observes.

October 2015, when he decided to start the school. Joe credits his time in the military for providing him with experience in leading and instructing others.

Joe consulted with his former instructor, Greg Mekulski (then the owner of Barber Styling Institute), who compiled a list of things Joe would need to do to be successful. Armed with a list (which he still keeps at his desk), a dream and the support of family, Joe closed a successful business to open one that could have a far-reaching impact on others. On day one of his new venture, Joe heeded Greg's best advice. Sitting in his vehicle in the parking lot, he gave up the business to a higher power.

"I give all the credit to God," he says. "If you've ever owned or started a business, there are a lot of sleepless nights once you've started, especially if you have a successful business that you walk away from. God and family support is huge."

Now Joe's typical day consists of arriving to the school to open the building and prepare for class before students arrive. After the morning class, customers begin arriving and Joe coaches



students through each cut. Then it's back home to Andrea, and their 2-year-old son, Parker.

Joe's students are a collection of unique personalities expressed in their grooming. One sports a moustache twist while another prefers a 1950s slicked-back style.

Joe's first graduate, Sam Gosa of Wingate, Centre County, opted for an orange tint when she returned to the school in July to encourage her classmates and to offer tips about taking the practical exam that she had just passed.

"If you stay busy and you're good at what you do, you can make some money at this," she tells the class.

Sam had her cosmetology license for five years prior to deciding to also pursue her barber's license. She found Martin's through Facebook while looking at a school in Pittsburgh. She says her time at Huntingdon definitely prepared her for the exam. She now works at her mother's shop, Debbie's Sharper Image, in Wingate.

"The school experience here is real-world because of the customers coming in," Sam says. "Joe makes you feel as if you can do it. I enjoyed my time coming here."

Eddie Fisher of State College became interested in the barbering field while helping out in the barbershop owned by his future father-in-law. He found out about Martin's Barber School from a customer just as he was about to enroll elsewhere.

"It was literally right before I went to beauty school," Eddie says. "I was in the first wave of people to enroll here. I want to open an old-school barbershop."

"The school is fantastic," Eddie says. "We have the freedom to try things and the knowledge through Joe to do it. It's nice to go into a place like this that will use all the resources available to help you. I love the way it's structured. It's run like a real barbershop. We get everybody here. We get all kinds of people and all kinds of hair."

Joe estimates two-thirds of his students are looking to open their own shops. He feels privileged to have a hand in the start of someone's career.

Joe advises people to give some thought to what it is they really want to do in life.

"We live in America," he says. "If you don't like your job, change. I can honestly say I love my job." ☀



Former Shade Gap district manager enjoying retirement in 'Promised Land'

BY DOUG ROLES
Manager of Member Services

A FORMER Valley Rural Electric Cooperative district manager who was instrumental in completing the co-op's recent digital system inventory is enjoying a well-deserved retirement. Rick Poleck spent the past several months settling into his new home in North Carolina after more than three decades of engineering, mapping and managerial service to the co-op.

Rick joined Valley REC June 1, 1981. He was hired as an engineering assistant.

"Basically, I provided support for engineering," he says. "I was hired to do a complete system inventory, but the technology wasn't there. You didn't have GPS and you didn't have the computer storage you do today. And the co-op would have needed aerial photos."

With the help of some summer employees, Rick instead completed a field inventory of poles and equipment, and later worked for more than two decades as a staking engineer laying out service for new members.

As technology improved and co-op management again looked at the benefits of a modern, digital inventory, Rick was pressed into service in 2008 as the co-op's automated mapping/facilities management and geographical information system, or AM/FM GIS, director.

"It was a panhandle of a title," Rick

recalls. "I knew it was going to be a daunting task. It took us a little over two years to get it done. I was pretty much a one-man show for a while."

Rick remembers that the demands of the position eventually led to the hiring of a mapping technician, someone to process all the geospatial data Rick was compiling.

"Matt worked out real well," Rick says of his former co-worker, GIS Tech-

surveying and mapping, though he holds a bachelor's degree in English from Shippensburg University. He credits one of his professors for encouraging him to finish college when he didn't see the need. Now his retirement plans include taking on a writing project. He is considering a non-fiction work based on his life experiences and also has an interest in creating a line of niche greeting cards.

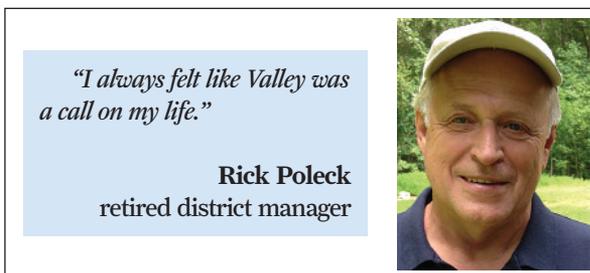
"I used to do a lot of painting and drawing," he says.

Since retiring, Rick has been busy with several home improvement projects, including wiring a newly-constructed garage and having a heat pump installed. He and Melinda made their move south to be near family and are excited about their new property and getting to know the area.

"The house is everything we ever wanted," he says. "We believe this is our little piece of the Promised Land. And it's nice not to have to roll out of bed at a given time and do what I want to do."

Rick says he feels blessed to have had a career at the co-op. He says cooperatives still abide by the principle of serving others.

"Of all the things I've done in my life, and I've done a lot — planting tombstones, road construction, sandblasting — I think Valley was handpicked for me by someone upstairs," Rick says. "I always felt Valley was a call on my life. It was like Valley was a mission." 🌞



"I always felt like Valley was a call on my life."

Rick Poleck
retired district manager

nician Matt Andrasi, who works out of the co-op's Huntingdon District office.

Rick recalls that his plan following the digital inventory was to maintain that system and then head into retirement. But his co-op journey had one more fork in the road when in 2011 he was asked to take on the position of Shade Gap district manager.

"That's where I finished off my career," he says.

Rick, a native of Wood, Huntingdon County, marked his last day at the co-op Feb. 26, 2015.

Prior to joining the Valley REC team, he had been employed full time in land surveying, a field he had worked in during college. Rick has always had an interest in

2015 pole inspection wraps up

Crews from Osmose Utilities Services, Inc., a company contracted by Valley Rural Electric Cooperative for pole maintenance, are wrapping up this year's pole inspection program. The annual sampling is used to identify poles that have degraded to the point of needing to be replaced.

Crews excavate the base of the pole, then sound check each one by striking multiple locations with a hammer to listen for hollow spots. Inspectors bore test each pole that is more than 20 years old.

"It's to see if the pole is starting to rot and to check that the core is not hollow," says Craig Burger, an Osmose foreman, as he taps a plug into

the boring he just checked.

When the inspection is completed, the pole base is treated with a water-resistant coating and wrapped in a moisture barrier. A metal Osmose tag listing the year of inspection is applied to the pole for future reference.

Poles are checked every 10 years. This year's sampling was conducted along rights-of-way in all three co-op districts.

AT RIGHT: Brian Richardson, an inspector with Osmose Utilities Services, Inc., checks the base of a pole in Frankstown Township, Blair County.

