

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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Guest Column



Valley REC welcomes new board member

By James Stauffer, VREC Board Chairman

ON BEHALF of Valley Rural Electric Cooperative's board of directors, I would like to welcome a new member to the board. Randall (Randy) Huntsman of Martinsburg was appointed in May to represent director District 1 on the nine-member board. He fills the unexpired term of Mervin Brumbaugh of Williamsburg, who recently resigned after more than 40 years of service.

A 1977 Central High School graduate, Randy works as an animal nutritionist with Renaissance Nutrition in Roaring Spring. Additionally, he is a crops manager with Kulp Family Dairy in Martinsburg and a bookkeeper for Hilecrest Farm, Tyrone.

Randy is a former North Woodbury Township supervisor. He comes to Valley REC with a wealth of co-op experience. He is a member of the following cooperatives: Land O'Lakes, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, Select Sire Power, AgChoice Farm Credit, Atlantic Dairy Cooperative, Bedford Farm Bureau and Genex Cooperative.

Additionally, Randy is an elder and a deacon at Martinsburg Grace Brethren Church and volunteers with Gideons International. He has also served on the board of directors of Blair County Dairy Herd Improvement Association, Blair County Holstein Club, Blair County Farm Bureau and Professional Dairy Managers of Pennsylvania.

He enjoys spending time with family, riding motorcycles and hunting.

Valley REC's service territory is divided into nine director districts that correspond with the nine seats on the co-op board. Each year, three of those positions are open for election, and nominating meetings are held in February. In 2017, those meetings will be held in Districts 1, 3 and 5. Nominees are then elected at the annual meeting in April.

District 1 includes Bloomfield and Woodbury townships in Bedford County, and Blair, Huston, North Woodbury, Taylor, and Woodbury townships in Blair County. ☀



McConnellsburg natives refurbish former high school building

By Liza Parks

Member Services Intern

“IT’S ALL about the kids” is the mantra of the McConnellsburg Alumni and Friends Association members as they rehabilitate an aging high school building to benefit the community. The renovation and maintenance of the former McConnellsburg High School is an ongoing project that requires much passion and dedication from a team of volunteers.

The building has been a place of progress since the association assumed the deed in 2009. At one point, the building was slated for demolition because an inspector declared it unfeasible to renovate.

Kathy Kendall, president of the alumni association and a Valley REC member, is primarily responsible for the operation and preservation of the building, which is now used as a community center.

Kathy says she will never forget the phone call she received from

her father when he heard the building might come down.

“Dad was in tears,” Kathy says.

Her father, the late Robert C. Snyder of McConnellsburg, insisted she take action to save the building from being torn down.

“So I decided to start the alumni and friends association and make the building into a community center,” Kathy says. “It’s all about trying to keep the kids busy. There isn’t much to do in Fulton County, and I want to keep the kids as far away from trouble as possible.”

Kathy’s mission has succeeded, and then some. The building now houses more than 20 programs and fundraisers that cater to the needs and desires of area residents. It is located in downtown McConnellsburg and hosts a whole range of activities, such as indoor soccer, basketball, activity nights, dances, and fitness classes. The building is available to members of the community to rent for any type of event. It is also home to the Fulton County All-Sports Museum, which includes a unique collection of sports displays and memorabilia donated by local residents who have made historical accomplishments. The kitchen is run by several faithful volunteers and is always stocked with snacks.

The alumni association members have been fundraising their hearts out to keep money rolling in for renovations. The biggest moneymakers are redneck bingo, an antique car show, dances for kids, fitness programs and the kitchen staying open at all times for snack sales.

Residents from throughout Fulton County, many of them Valley REC members, and their children use the building for everything the alumni association offers. Kathy’s goal of making sure there is something for the kids to do shows how much she cares for them, like they are her very own. She enforces rules at the center to teach them discipline, but she is always encouraging them to “never stop playing.”



TEAM OF VOLUNTEERS: The McConnellsburg Alumni and Friends Association is headed by Kathy Kendall, center. She is joined by, from left: Carole Reel, Ruth Reeder, Faye Elvey, Paul Johnston, William Kendall and Jerry Books.



ABOVE: Guests can always grab a bite to eat in the kitchen of the community building. Kathy Kendall, association president, is looking to expand her team of volunteers to keep the building in tip-top shape and keep donations rolling in.

TOP LEFT: Located on 301 East Maple Street in downtown McConnellsburg, the association's community building is a great place for people of all ages to fellowship and have fun.

Aside from keeping the local children busy, Kathy opens the center's doors to other community organizations. A mental health facility, NewVisions, has a clubhouse where its members can watch movies, play pool and socialize. The Fulton County Barn Quilters occupy "the paint room" downstairs where they can be found working on their next quilting project.

The center is also home to workout programs such as zumba, yoga and pilates. Kathy taught physical education at McConnellsburg School District for 40 years, which is why she hosts so many indoor sports, tournaments, dances and activities in the gym. Community parties, charity events, banquets, reunions and other special occasions are always happening at the center. The volunteers even offer home-cooked catering.

"The community really contributes to the operation of this place," Kathy says. "Besides our fundraisers, we run solely off of donations from local companies and organizations."

She also explains the success of the building would not be possible without her team of volunteers. The dedication of this team is fueled by their history with the building. Each volunteer grew up in this very building, completing their classwork and making memories. They agree they want to see it continue to be the center of great childhood memories.

One of the most important parts of keeping the building running is the electricity required for lighting, heating and air conditioning. The alumni association has been working to upgrade all of the electrical systems to be as energy-efficient and safe as possible.

"It's an old building, built in the 1920s, so there's a lot of space to take care of," says Jerry Books, one of the association's dedicated volunteers.

The association received a \$500 Community Service Grant from Valley REC earlier this year. Kathy's initial motive in applying for funding was to put the money into updating the lighting and electrical outlets in the building. That is exactly what she is doing. Each room has its own heating source so guests can control the temperature to their liking. Many of the rooms are also air-conditioned, which is great for the people who use the building during the summer months.

The team of volunteers worked together on a major project to replace the enormous windows in the kids' movie room on a mission to save money on electricity. Now, Kathy is going to embark on a new journey of updating electrical systems in the basement of the building. She has an endless collection of sports equipment, holiday décor, fitness gear and so much more scattered throughout the maze of the basement. She is continuing to work on organizing these treasures, but finds it difficult to do without proper lighting. The grant money she received from the co-op will be going directly into the upgrade of the lighting system in the basement. This will give volunteers easier access to equipment and other items needed from storage. Kathy hopes to get everything installed before this fall. For Halloween, the basement of the building will be transformed into a spooky "haunted house" fundraiser for the kids. The new lighting system will allow for more dramatic props, which will give the kids bigger thrills for the price of admission.

The association members express their gratitude for Valley's grant initiative by spreading the word about the program. Kathy and her family learned about the new program at its launch during the cooperative's 2015 annual meeting in Huntingdon. They decided it would be helpful in expanding their own long-term community service project. The grant program is funded by unclaimed capital credits. Funds are available in three categories: energy assistance, civic and community programs, and education. Applicants could receive a grant of \$500 to \$1,000 to improve the education and safety of our communities.

Kathy encourages Valley REC members to bring their families to one of the events at the center to check out everything they have to offer. From the haunted house to redneck bingo, from the annual dodgeball tournament to the Fulton County Folk Festival, the community center's upcoming events will be fun for all ages.

The association invites anyone, especially Fulton County natives, to become a member of the McConnellsburg Alumni and Friends Association for \$25 per year. Kathy is always looking to build her team of volunteers to help with maintenance of the building and to chaperone the activities for "her kids." Additionally, the alumni association is always accepting donations of local sports memorabilia that may hold some historic value.

Valley REC is proud to support such a wonderful community project. ☀



RENOVATIONS: Funds from Valley REC's Community Service Grant Program are being used by the McConnellsburg Alumni and Friends Association to upgrade the inadequate lighting system in the basement.

Life's a beach for longtime Valley Rural Electric employee

By Doug Roles
Manager of Member Services

A VALLEY REC retiree who grew up with the co-op is enjoying the freedom of retirement. Nancy Rife, formerly Valley's billing department supervisor, then automated metering infrastructure (AMI) specialist, retired in December with 41 years of service.

She says she enjoyed her career and thinks the co-op is a great place to work. But she also likes not having to wake up at 5:25 a.m.

"I'm enjoying my schedule; I have no schedule," she says. "I can't say I've been bored once."

Nancy began her career with the co-op in September 1974. She was 16 and a senior at Huntingdon Area High School. A teacher told her about a part-time job opportunity at Valley Rural Electric through the high school's work-study program. Nancy began working noon to 5:30 p.m. at the main office (then located along Route 26, north of Huntingdon) after spending the morning in school.

"I was hired to do data entry; I didn't even know what the 'REA' was," Nancy recalls.

She worked part time for Valley through the school year and then was asked if she would like to stay on for a while longer in a full-time capacity. She graduated on June 6 and started working full time on June 9.

"I didn't think it'd be for 40-plus years," Nancy says. "I was 17. I literally grew up at the co-op."

Nancy transferred from data entry to the billing department when she started working full time. She worked for Hilda Horne, the billing department supervisor at the time. Nancy would eventually move into that position and help the co-op launch automated metering. In the last several years of her employment, she transitioned into working full time with the new metering system. A large portion of her job entailed compiling reports from the data provided by the new digital infrastructure.

Nancy says the biggest change she saw in the co-op during her career was the move to automation. When she started,



RETIRED: Nancy Rife is spending more time at her beach house in South Carolina these days. She retired in December as the co-op's automated metering infrastructure (AMI) specialist. She worked at Valley Rural Electric for more than 40 years.

data entry was accomplished using punch cards, and members took their own meter readings. Office technology then evolved to the use of reel tape and large floppy discs, and then to computers at every work station as well as in the field.

"I went through it all; I loved what I did," says Nancy, who says she was "a bit of a perfectionist" on the job.

Nancy says her plans are to enjoy her free time, spend time at the beach and perhaps learn more about photography.

Nancy resides in Oneida Township, Huntingdon County, with her husband, Jim. They are the parents of two grown children, Steve Snare, and his wife, Stephanie, of Huntingdon; and Brett Snare and wife, Jordan, of Columbia, Md. Nancy and Jim have three grandchildren: Kaiden, Ryder and Parris. 🌞

Valley REC members asked to dial direct when paying bills by phone

Valley Rural Electric has changed the way members pay their bills by phone. The co-op is asking consumers to call our IVR Secure Pay vendor directly at **866-999-4591**. The direct number is being provided to increase consumer security.

Previously, members would select the "payment by phone" option from the co-op's phone menu or be transferred into the payment system after speaking to a receptionist. With this change, Valley's staff will no longer be able to transfer incoming phone calls to the phone payment system.

"We're protecting member information," says Ben Gorman, Valley's manager of business administration. "If they dial that number, there is a direct connection between the consumer and the payment portal!"

Valley REC members have a number of options when it comes to paying bills. The co-op launched the SmartHub bill payment platform in February 2015. That system allows members to pay bills online using a smartphone or tablet.

Regardless of the option members choose, Valley REC wants to make the

chance of identity theft as small as possible.

"We're doing our best to stay PCI (payment card industry) compliant," Ben says. "Our people don't handle credit cards. Also, the card swipers in our office are virtually segregated from the rest of our network."

Members can also pay bills by mail. Those who pay bills by mail are asked not to staple their check to the bill because it slows processing because staples have to be removed by hand before the checks can be scanned. Checks should be filled out using black ink. 🌞