

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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Guest Column



Giving back for Independence Day

By Ethan DeVore, *Director of Member Services*

JULY IS one of the most important months of the year for American history. It's typically known as the time of year where people put up numerous decorations with stars and stripes and sport as much red, white, and blue as they can. Many of us get caught up in the fireworks and excessive Fourth of July celebrations that often can overshadow the true meaning behind the holiday. Although it most definitely is a time to gather with family and friends to celebrate, it is more importantly a time for us to remember everything men and women before us went through to grant us the privilege to live with the freedoms we have today.

With all the sacrifices made for us — both past and present — to live such enriched lives, it is our part to return the favor by giving back. In the cooperative world, we strive to give back by following the seventh cooperative principle — “Concern for Community.”

Valley REC has several programs created to help give back to the local communities. One of the more recently established programs is the Community Service Grant (CSG) program, which was created in 2015. The CSG program has enabled Valley REC to provide grants to its members, service agencies and educators. The money to fund this initiative comes from unclaimed capital credits refunds that previously had to be turned over to the state treasury, but now, thanks to the efforts of the cooperative's political advocates, can be kept in our local

communities. The grants have helped members experiencing financial hardship due to death, divorce, hospitalization or other tragic life circumstances. They have also provided civic organizations with necessary funding needed to follow their missions. Lastly, the program has supplied educators with materials for their classrooms. Since its inception, the CSG program has given more than \$200,000 in grants back to local communities.

Another program Valley REC offers to its consumers is Members Helping Members (MHM). MHM was designed to provide financial assistance to members who are unable to pay their electric bills due to employment-related loss of (or reduction of) income. This program is a consumer-funded program set up by the cooperative that works by providing members with the option to round up their electric bill to the next dollar. The money in excess then goes to the MHM fund, which is used toward qualifying applicants.

As Independence Day closes in on us, don't forget to take some time reflect on everything men and women went through to help pave the way for us today. To show appreciation for all the sacrifices made, Valley REC will strive to continue its efforts in creating initiatives that will allow the cooperative to give back to the local communities. For more information about the programs and services currently offered by Valley REC, visit the cooperative's website at www.valleyrec.com. Have a great Fourth, everyone! 🇺🇸

Seventh-graders head down to the farm

By Ethan DeVore

Director of Member Services

STUDENTS recently had the opportunity to get away from their desks and head out to a farm for a day of learning. The annual Ag Career Days enabled approximately 1,400 students from Blair County public schools to spend the day touring farm facilities while learning about the diverse variety of jobs related to the agriculture industry.

Each year, the Altoona Blair County Development Corporation (ABCD Corp.) coordinates the event for the seventh-graders of Blair County public schools. The ABCD Corp. is a private, non-profit, economic development corporation that works to facilitate business expansion in Blair County. Through the company's programs and services, it strives to keep Blair County a competitive community that can attract and retain talent, investment, and job opportunities for future generations.

This year's Ag Career Days, held May 1-2, mark the third event hosted at the Kulp Family Dairy Farm in Martinsburg, Pa., and it was a huge success. On the first day, seventh-graders from Hollidaysburg, Williamsburg, Claysburg-Kimmel, Spring Cove, and

Bellwood-Antis attended the event, while seventh-graders from Altoona and Tyrone attended on the second day.

"Ag Career Days provide a great opportunity to educate students about agriculture," says Phil Kulp, owner of the farm. "It gives them a chance to see there is much more to farming than milking cows."

Dave Hileman, of Hilecrest Farms in Sinking Valley and a Valley REC member for over 20 years, spoke about how the idea originated after he realized many youth have a steadily declining interest level in agriculture. He tried to think of ways he could make an impact on the younger generation, and his idea crystalized once he heard from a group of friends at Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin. They told him about an event they hold each year to get students on the farm so they can glimpse the wide variety of careers related to agriculture. After noting that program's success, Hileman decided to organize a similar event in Blair County.

Hileman, a member of the ABCD Corp.'s Ag Committee, brought up the idea at a meeting and the rest is history. The event has proven to be so successful that it won a nationally recognized award — the 2016 County



ABOVE: Erin Deitle, center, of Godshall Insurance Agency LLC, explains to students how insurance works in relation to agriculture.

Activities of Excellence Award given by the American Farm Bureau Federation. According to Joe Diamond of Altoona, a representative of the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, only 16 of the 50 states have received the award.

Hileman says there are three goals the event needs to achieve to be successful.

"First, we want students to be exposed to the different kinds of jobs available related to farming," he says. "Second, we want their teachers,

ON THE FARM: Seventh-graders are hauled across the farm to the next learning station.



counselors and administrators to be exposed, as well, so they can help drive students to the different types of career paths offered in the agriculture industry. Lastly, we want the students to understand that you don't have to grow up on a farm to have a career in agriculture."

The event consists of 16 stations covering four categories — animals, crops, management and environment. Each station provides insight into the types of jobs available in that category and how it plays a part in the overall agriculture industry. Jobs can range from being a veterinarian to an accountant, and the Ag Career Days event demonstrates the diversity of the jobs offered — many of which might be overlooked by younger generations.

"If we can attract some talented and bright young minds to work in agriculture someday, then we've done our job," Hileman says.

Kulp explains that agriculture in Blair County is very successful. However, despite the success the region has in farming, students who live outside the farming areas are sometimes unaware of how important agriculture is to the community.

Justin Welsh, a seventh-grade teacher from Altoona Junior High, agrees, mentioning how students who live in town sometimes can have a very limited view of what goes into farming.

"I think it's great that the students can get exposure to the variety of careers in agriculture available in the area," Welsh says. "Even though some of the students live in Altoona, they've never been to a farm to see everything that goes into it."

To cap off the two-day event hosted at the Kulp Dairy Farm, lunch was provided to all attendees. Hileman is appreciative for all parties who contributed to make Ag Career Days successful. He explains that none of it would be possible without the support of the community — from the donors who raise money to meet the \$25,000 budget to the volunteers and speakers who help out. A list of businesses and farms that donated is shown on the right:



ABOVE: Terry Woodring of Diamond Lane Farm, a New Enterprise REC member and a former Valley REC member, talks to students about his Percheron draft horse breeding farm located in the Allegheny Mountains of Pennsylvania.

BELOW: Rachel DiAndrea, left, along with friend, Melissa Laratonda, right, owner of Broken Wheel Ranch in Hollidaysburg, show off a horse named Gypsy Rose to the students participating in Ag Career Days.



- ▶ Ritchey's Dairy
- ▶ Delgrosso Foods, Inc.
- ▶ Penn State Altoona
- ▶ Ace Fix-It Hardware
- ▶ Logan Valley Oil
- ▶ Metz Sales Inc.
- ▶ Reliance Bank
- ▶ Allied Milk Producers
- ▶ Imler's Poultry
- ▶ M&T Bank
- ▶ Hite Electric
- ▶ Nason Foundation
- ▶ Center for Dairy Excellence
 - ▶ Land O'Lakes
- ▶ Blair County Conservation District
 - ▶ Committee Members
 - ▶ FirstEnergy
 - ▶ Sheetz
- ▶ Roaring Spring Bottled Water
- ▶ Key State Ag Service LLC
 - ▶ Growmark FS
- ▶ Pennsylvania Dairymen's Association
- ▶ Professional Dairy Producers

Meet your employees

FEATURED in this column is a recent addition to the Valley REC team, Matt Gorman. Matt and his family reside in East Freedom, and he has worked out of the Martinsburg District office since November as an HVAC technician/electrician for the Valley REC Energy Services (VRES), a division of VREC.

A native of Roaring Spring, Matt graduated from Central High School in 2005. While in high school, Matt was the class president. He also played football and wrestled. Outside of school, he spent most of his time working.

"I've been on construction sites since I was 10 years old," Matt says. "By 15, I started working with heating systems."

Matt also went to vo-tech while in high school, where he focused his time learning as much as he could about HVAC, electric and plumbing.

Upon graduation, Matt immediately went to work subcontracting for Miller Heating. He also started his own business, Gorman Heating, where he was self-employed until he turned 31. During that time, Matt worked long-

hour weeks and continued to grow his pedigree in learning HVAC systems.

After he and his wife, Brittany, decided to start raising a family, Matt decided he wanted to look for a job that allowed him to spend more time at home.

"I became tired of working 150 hours every two weeks," Matt says. "I was ready to slow down and see more of my family."

Fortunately for him, he received a call from fellow VRES electrician, Zach Yohn, who asked if he would be interested in working for Valley Rural. Matt didn't hesitate to take the job and has been with the cooperative ever since.

As far as how Matt feels about his job at Valley REC, he says, "I love it. It's 10 times better than what I was doing before. It is way more laid back than being self-employed."

He's also very happy with his work colleagues.



ON BOARD: Matt Gorman is the newest member of the Valley Rural, working as an HVAC technician and electrician for Valley REC Energy Services.

"Everybody I've met so far is really great to work with," he says. "Everyone has been extremely nice and very helpful."

Outside of work, Matt enjoys hunting, fishing and spending time with his family. His 5-year-old son, Braydon, and 2-year-old daughter, Bailee, keep him very busy.

With over 21 years of experience, Matt is very knowledgeable in his field. He's one of the people you can count on. 🌞



Electrical Services
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