

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



Fair season is our chance to meet you

By Doug Roles, *Vice President, Member Services*

IT'S FAIR and festival season in central Pennsylvania! If you haven't gotten out to an event to see livestock, take in some crafts or get filled up on fair food, opportunities abound. For many years, Valley REC has staffed tables at two county fairs in our service territory — the event in Huntingdon in early August and the Juniata County Fair, taking place as this issue of *Penn Lines* arrives in your mailbox. As much as we enjoy funnel cakes and hot sausage sandwiches, getting out to the fair is about having an additional opportunity to meet members and hear your concerns.

Frequently, we'll have members take a moment to stop by our booth and tell us we're doing a good job. We always appreciate hearing it! A few words of praise go a long way.

Members who have a concern are equally encouraged to visit our table. If the employee staffing the booth at the time doesn't have an answer, we can certainly take the question back to the office and get it on the desk of the person who needs to be involved.


Some visitors to our table have asked why members continue to get calls from telemarketers about switching electric generation suppliers. As a Valley member, if you receive a telemarketing call, you can simply inform the caller that you are served by a co-op.

Electric utility choice came to Pennsylvania in 1999-2001. But no alternative electric suppliers chose to serve Valley REC's territory, likely because of our competitive rates, low density of consumers and low number of large

industrial accounts. As to why you might continue to receive phone calls, we assume calls are made by area code and that telemarketers don't separate out Valley members from other area residents served by investor-owned utilities.

Other fairgoers have asked about extending power to outbuildings and wanted to know if they should have a second meter installed or run a line from their homes. If you are in this situation or are planning new construction, don't hesitate to contact us. Our staking engineers can visit your property and explain your options.

Members frequently ask about blinking lights, wondering if something is wrong with the power supply. It's likely that the blinks were caused by automatic reclosers on our system working as intended. In many instances, line faults are temporary (think of a tree limb falling into our line and then tumbling away). A recloser is a circuit breaker that detects momentary faults and prevents them from causing an outage. They may cause your lights to blink, but they prevent service interruptions.

Other questions range from billing issues to concerns about dead trees near our lines. One member asked why we continue to staff a fair booth. The argument can certainly be made that, in this age of email, voicemail and instant messaging, there are alternative ways to communicate. However, we still feel that staffing a table and having our employees meet members personally is time well spent. The ice cream and cotton candy are just a bonus. 

Reclaimed: Local couple pursues winemaking passion together after health scare

By Doug Roles

Vice President of Member Services

TO SAY someone has been “bitten by the bug” means, figuratively, that someone has become excited or fascinated by a certain pursuit. But there’s more than one way for a bug bite to lead to the next chapter in your life. Just ask Valley REC member Charlie Knouse of McVeytown, Mifflin County.

Charlie and his wife, Kristy, started their winery business, Reclaimed Vines, in their home in the summer of 2017 and are enjoying bringing a variety of custom wines to the local market. Earlier this year, they opened a storefront and tasting room in Huntingdon where they offer bottled wine, wine slushies and wine pop-sicles. They’ve been marketing their venture through social media, music events, and word of mouth, and are excited at their growing following.

“The community has been very welcoming to us,” Kristy says.

“This is an awesome town,” Charlie agrees. “The people here have been really good to us.”

Charlie says he’s always had an interest in winemaking and craft beers and had made small batches of wine at home. But his decision to take his



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

A PASSION FOR WINE: Valley REC members Charlie and Kristy Knouse of McVeytown display two of their most popular Reclaimed Vines wines, Merica, a light strawberry wine, and Blueberry Mousse, a sweet dessert wine. The Knouses started Reclaimed Vines in 2017 after Charlie rebounded from a severe illness and made a decision to pursue his passion.

hobby to another level came after recovering from a bout of Lyme disease, a tick-borne illness that is becoming all too common.

Charlie and Kristy, Juniata County natives, have lived in the McVeytown area of Mifflin County for the past 11 years. They bought a 17-acre property in Ferguson Valley, Oliver Township, in 2017. Charlie had in mind that the extra space would be perfect, eventually, for winemaking on a larger scale.

The couple, who together have five children ages 9 to 19, were busy moving into their new home when Charlie developed flu-like symptoms. The tick bite had happened while he was clearing a portion of their new ground. Charlie became so ill he was bedridden. Then things got worse.

His condition deteriorated and he developed meningitis, a swelling of the brain stem. After a brief stay at Geisinger Lewistown Hospital, he was

transferred to Geisinger Holy Spirit in Harrisburg where he spent a week receiving a course of antibiotics. He was dehydrated and had lost 25 pounds.

“It scared me a little bit, honestly,” Charlie says.

Charlie, who works for the state Department of Corrections, would be off work for the next month. The experience gave him a chance to count his blessings and think about the things he wants to accomplish in life.

“That was in July 2017,” Charlie recalls. “By the end of August, we became an LLC and got Reclaimed Vines started.”

Charlie, who served in the active Army and U.S. Army Reserve, used GI Bill funding to pursue an associate degree in enology (winemaking) at Harrisburg Area Community College. Attending classes part time for two and a half years, he learned more about the practical aspects of the winemaking process — including a 12-week course in sanitization of winemaking equipment — along with the math, biology and chemistry the trade entails.



HONEYBEE HIVE: Charlie Knouse of McVeytown prepares to check one of his honeybee hives. He uses the home-grown honey to make mead.

Reclaimed Vines specializes in turning Pennsylvania fruits into fun wines with a unique taste. The Knouses started with apple, blueberry and strawberry products. Recently, they purchased 600 pounds of peaches from a Gettysburg grower. They make it a point to support a grow local/buy local approach.

Pennsylvania is not as well known as other areas of the country for winemaking. But trade groups like the Pennsylvania Winery Association would like to change that. A Pennsylvania Wine Land brochure currently lists 275 small wineries across the Commonwealth. The Knouses are proud to be part of a growing community of local winemakers.

Charlie says it's fun to experiment, though Kristy says he's a perfectionist. In addition to fruit-based wines, he also makes mead from honey collected from hives he manages on his property.

"We strive really hard to do something different," Kristy says. "We have quite a following locally."

"It still kind of boggles my mind, people wanting our products," Charlie says.

The Knouses are continuing

to increase their capacity with a recent installation of 350-gallon tanks in addition to the 150-gallon units they have been using. They say winemaking is a mix of experimenting with tastes and planning production. For those not familiar with the time investment required for winemaking, Charlie explains that from the starting point of preparing fruit "at the very least you're not bottling wine for six months."

Charlie and Kristy picked the "Reclaimed" name for several reasons. Initially, it came from Charlie's plans to reclaim some old grape vines he found on their new property. He and

Kristy also chose the name because it connects the family's faith in God with their products and their new business.

Running Reclaimed Vines keeps the entire family busy, especially Kristy, who also homeschools the younger children. Charlie and Kristy's goal for the business is to develop it to a point where it can be passed on to the children, should they decide to get into winemaking. Charlie's advice to those who have been putting off pursuing a dream is to realize that there may never be a better time than now.

"Get started," he says. "You never know what could happen." 🌞



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRANDY CARLIN

Reclaimed Vines frequently hosts live music events, like this June 22 performance by Ryan Carter Trio. The storefront along 4th Street, Huntingdon, includes an outdoor seating area and a tasting room.

Co-op hosts annual Red Cross blood drive

Valley REC journeyman lineman Jason Wilson, who works at the co-op's Shade Gap District, donates blood Tuesday, Aug. 6, during Valley's annual blood drive. American Red Cross collection specialists from Altoona staffed the bloodmobile and collected 21 units during the afternoon-long event, held at Valley REC's corporate office near Huntingdon. Each donated unit could help save up to three lives. To find a blood drive near you, visit redcrossblood.org or call 1-800-RED-CROSS (1-800-733-2767).



Valley Rural Electric Cooperative awards 15 \$1,000 scholarships to local students

By John Bookwalter

Special Projects Coordinator

VALLEY Rural Electric Cooperative recently awarded 15 \$1,000 scholarships to high school seniors as well as students already enrolled in post-secondary institutions.

The co-op's Brighter Future Scholarship Program was established in 2010 to assist eligible students who are cooperative members or their dependents. To date, Valley has conferred nearly \$210,000 in scholarship grants. Selection criteria include academic achievement, school activities and community service.

The money to finance this initiative comes from unclaimed capital credits refunds that previously had to be turned over to the state treasury. But thanks to the efforts of the cooperative's political advocates, these resources can now be kept in co-op communities and used to assist consumers facing financial hardships, to support civic organizations, and to fund educational programs.

The following 12 public high school seniors received scholarships from Valley REC:

Bedford County: Tussey Mountain High School – Brittany A. Chadwick of James Creek, daughter of Annette and Darrin Chadwick, attending Juniata College.

Blair County: Central High School – Madeline P. Metzler of Martinsburg, daughter of Marshall and Holly Metzler, attending Lock Haven University; and Alyssa M. Reed of Roaring Spring, daughter of Jamie and Travis Dum mire, attending Juniata College; Claysburg-Kimmel High School – Olivia P. Locke of Portage, daughter of Darron and Melissa Locke, attending Penn State University; Hollidaysburg Area Senior High School – Alexandria B. Auerbeck and Alycia B. Auerbeck, daughters of David and Tracy Auerbeck of Hollidaysburg, both attending Penn State University.

Fulton County: McConnellsburg High School – Rebecca M. Wenschhof of Needmore, daughter of Ed and Lisa Wenschhof, attending Shippensburg University.

Huntingdon County: Huntingdon Area High School – Rachael E. Gwinn of James Creek, daughter of Allen and Heather Gwinn, attending Lebanon Valley College; and Sean T. McLaughlin of Petersburg, son of Laurie and Mark McLaughlin, attending Northland College; Mount Union Area High School – Alexis J. Danish of Shirlleysburg, daughter of Joe and Keli Danish, attending Penn State University; Southern Huntingdon County High School – Mikara G. Anderson of Three Springs, daughter of Gerald and Holly Anderson, attending Penn

State University; and Brooke A. Carbaugh of Orbisonia, daughter of William & Pamela Carbaugh, attending Hope College.

In addition, Heather R. Pearson of Hollidaysburg, daughter of Mark and Fiona Pearson, a 2019 graduate of Grier School planning to attend Oberlin College and Conservatory, was selected to receive a Brighter Future scholarship.

Two current college students also received scholarships from Valley REC for the 2019-20 academic year: Brian P. McLaughlin of Petersburg, son of Mark and Laurie McLaughlin and a 2016 graduate of Huntingdon Area High School, attending Penn State University; and Kala Kanthi Mensah-Dzomley of Port Royal, daughter of Yasoda and Madhava Mensah-Dzomley and a 2016 graduate of home schooling, attending Cornish College of the Arts.

Valley Rural Electric is a member-owned cooperative providing electric service to consumers in eight counties of south-central Pennsylvania, including Bedford, Blair, Centre, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata and Mifflin. For more information about Valley Rural Electric Cooperative's Brighter Future Scholarship Program, call 800-432-0680 or visit valleyrec.com and follow the Programs and Services link to the Scholarships section. 🌞

Going the Extra Mile

Electric cooperatives maintain more miles of power lines per consumer than other types of electric utilities. Even though they serve fewer consumers and acquire less revenue, electric co-ops always go the extra mile to power the communities they serve.



Electric Co-ops



Consumers served per mile: **8**
Revenue: **\$19,000**

Other Electric Utilities



Consumers served per mile: **32**
Revenue: **\$79,000**

Sources: EIA, 2017 data. Includes revenue and consumer averages per mile of line.

Have a story idea for Valley REC's Penn Lines pages?

We're always interested in sharing with our readers the stories of co-op members who have a unique hobby or a new business. Think you have an interesting story to tell? Contact our Member Services Department at member-services@valleyrec.com or call us at 800-432-0680.