

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

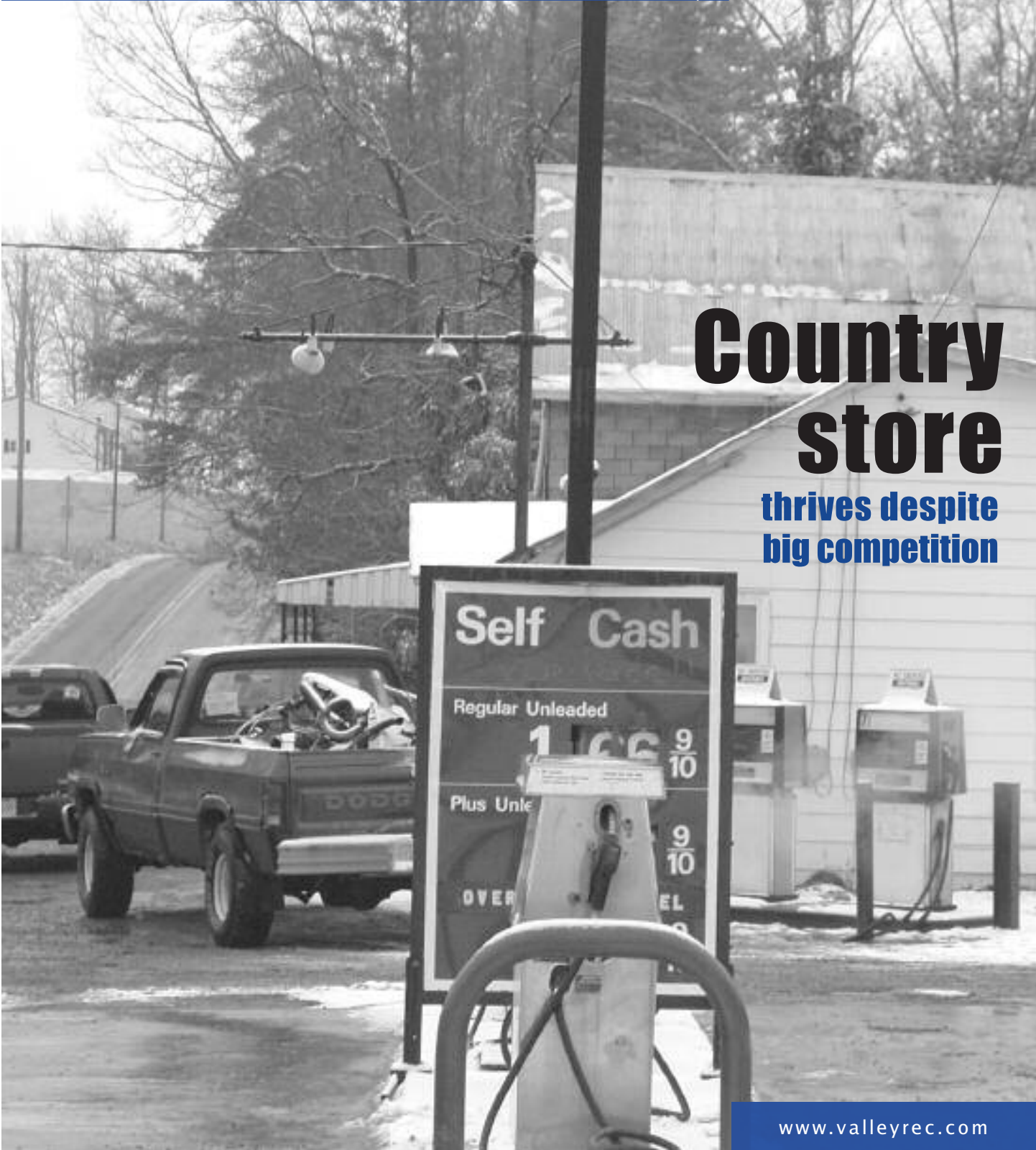
Valley News

January | February 2008

Volume 65 | Issue 1

Country store

thrives despite big competition



www.valleyrec.com

How do you like our new look?

AS YOU HAVE PROBABLY noticed, this issue of *Valley News* features an entirely new look – one that we hope you will find more attractive and readable.

When we decided to redesign the newsletter, our goal was not necessarily to make it "trendy" or "cutting edge." Rather, our aim was to emphasize our commitment to offer you the highest quality products and services. Our publications (*Valley News* and *Penn Lines*) serve as the main source of information for our members, which means we have an obligation to continually seek ways to enhance their value.

Some of the improvements you'll notice in this edition include: spot color throughout, column headers for easy navigation, updated font styles, additional photos and our Web site address. Some things we didn't change: our popular two-page Trading Post section, our center-spread local feature layout and the page we reserve for current information on energy-related and co-op issues.

In addition to boosting appearance and readability, one of our chief goals with the redesign was to improve the newsletter without any significant cost to our members. Many publications that want to launch a new look do so with the help of expensive outside design consultants. We were able to accomplish this complex project completely in house. In other words, co-op employees did all the work! That saved us a bundle of money. Plus, we believe the final product is stronger because we utilized the people that best know your co-op's history, market and mission.

Revamping a publication involves a long, well-thought-out process. There is a research phase, followed by a brainstorming and collaboration phase. Then recommendations are made and a design is created and refined. During the production phase, the pieces are put together to yield a product that hopefully surpasses readers' expectations.



Edward A. Dezich
President & Chief Executive Officer

"We have an obligation to continually seek ways to enhance (our publications') value."

Along the way, we have considered you to be not only our target audience but also our creative partners in this process. Before launching this redesign, we very carefully regarded your wants and needs. And now that the finished newsletter has reached your mailbox, we hope you'll continue to take your roles very seriously.

We look forward to receiving any questions, comments or suggestions you might have about the new look of *Valley News*. And, as always, we welcome your feedback on any other products or services we provide. Just call our member services department at 814/643-2650 or toll-free 800/432-0680, or email memberservices@valleyrec.com.

Cooperatively yours,

Edward A. Dezich
President & CEO

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Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



On the cover ...

DeShong's Store, located near Needmore, Fulton County, is owned and operated by Walter and Deb DeShong. Assisted by part-time help, the couple has been selling groceries, hot and cold deli foods, gasoline and batteries for nearly 10 years. For more information on this local landmark, turn to Pages 4-5.

Comparing bills doesn't add up

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED

why your electric bill is higher or lower than your neighbor's? It seems logical to consider each appliance you have in common and assume that your electric use would be similar, too.

Actually, electric bills are difficult, if not impossible, to compare. No two households share the same living habits. Even people within the same family don't use electricity in the same way.

For instance, heating and cooling offers a wide range of variance. Insulation values in attics, ceilings and walls may differ greatly among older and newer homes. Seals on doors and windows may not be tight. And occupants don't always remember to turn down their thermostats at the same time every night.

Water heating is another expense that varies according to use. Teenagers are notorious for taking long showers. Add a baby to the domestic scene and laundry becomes a daily chore. Even how you wash dishes affects your water heating costs.

When calculating your electric use, you must consider your lifestyle. Do you purchase every electronic device that comes on the market? Do you cook meals in the oven or microwave? Do you turn on the TV to watch your favorite show or do you leave it on as background noise day and night? Do you hang laundry on the line or let it tumble in the dryer?

It's not reasonable to compare your electric bills with those of other consumers. You may be willing to pay for the convenience that electricity provides without questioning the cost, but others may not. It's certainly too late to conserve when the bill arrives and you find you may have wasted energy while your friends or neighbors were using it more efficiently.

Comparing electric bills just doesn't add up. Instead, focus on controlling your energy use and see the impact you can make on your expenses.



Photo by Luanne H. Eckenrode

GRAND TOUR: Students on Youth Tour visit landmarks like the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.

Have dreams of traveling? Start with the 2008 Youth Tour

ARE YOU a high school junior or senior who longs to do something adventurous this summer? Do you enjoy history, government or political science, as well as sightseeing and making new friends? If so, the 2008 Rural Electric Youth Tour might be for you!

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative will sponsor students from throughout the cooperative's service territory on an all-expense-paid trip to the nation's capital June 15-20.

Youth Tour participants will get the chance to visit historic sites, meet with federal legislators, learn about rural electric cooperatives ... and have fun!

More than 40,000 students from rural areas and small towns across America have participated in the Youth Tour. Some Youth Tour alums have gone on to serve in the highest ranks of our government, including the U.S. Senate.

If you're interested in joining the Youth Tour delegation, here's what you need to know:

- ▶ Any high school junior or senior whose parent or guardian is a member or employee of Valley REC is eligible to apply.
- ▶ Students will be required to submit a transcript (available from your high school guidance counselor) along with additional information to the co-op selection committee.
- ▶ Selections will be based on academic achievement as well as participation in extracurricular activities and/or community service programs.
- ▶ For more information, contact Valley Rural Electric Cooperative's member services department at 814/643-2650 or toll-free 800/432-0680, or email memberservices@valleyrec.com.

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More than a ge

Rural residents get their fill of gas, groceries and country hospitality at DeShong's Korner Store



ABOVE: At the corner store, rural residents can purchase prepared foods, gasoline and other household supplies. RIGHT: Deb DeShong slices meat for the deli.

neral store

BY SUSAN R. PENNING
Communications Specialist
Member Services Department

From colonial times through much of the 19th century, general stores were the primary places to buy goods. Then, during the first half of the 20th century, many general stores were forced out of business by specialized retailers that could offer wider selections in categories like sporting goods and clothing. From the 1960s through the 1990s, large numbers of these specialty stores were, in turn, crushed by "big-box" wholesale establishments and all-in-one "hypermarkets" like Wal-Mart and Target.

Interestingly, general stores in rural communities have experienced a sort of revival due to their convenience and nostalgia. In fact, a small number of "corner stores" continue to thrive despite competition from large chains. DeShong's Korner Store outside Needmore, Fulton County, is one of them.

Currently owned and operated by Valley REC members Walter and Deb DeShong, the convenience store has been a lucrative business since the early 1900s. The DeShongs purchased the establishment in 1998 from Joel and Marita Elvey. During the first year, the DeShongs focused on expansion. They



turned the store's living quarters into shelf space and added gas and diesel pumps. Later they began selling automobile, tractor and all-terrain vehicle batteries.

Walter remembers his trip to a local bank to borrow money for fuel pumps.

"The folks at the bank were reluctant at first," he says. "They just weren't sure we could do a good business way out here in the middle of nowhere."

As it turns out, gasoline and diesel fuel became the bulk of their business.

"The nearest gas station is 12 to 17 miles away," Deb says. "We really felt there was a need in this community for some pumps. And we were right."

"It's neat to see all the school buses pull up to get gas," she adds. "We even see folks driving their lawn mowers right up to the tanks."

In addition to fuel, the DeShongs sell hardware, groceries, prepared foods and deli items. They are assisted by part-time helpers Melanie Keener, Amber Gladhill and Kelsi and Nikki Swope.

Walter and Deb live within walking distance of the store, which seems to add to the charm of the place.

"Late one night we were restoring power in a wind storm and needed fuel for one of our trucks," recalls Valley REC Operations

ON THE JOB: Walter DeShong handles daily operations at the store. He says business typically stays steady throughout the day.

Manager Greg Henry. "Walter got out of bed and opened the store for us so we could get some gas."

The DeShongs attribute their success to their commitment to pleasing customers.

"We've always listened to what folks asked for and built from there," Deb says.

Although they've enjoyed more than a decade of good fortune with the shop, the couple is ready to pass the torch.

"We want to spend more time with our kids and grandkids," Walter says.

However, selling the business will be bittersweet.

"I've met a lot of people and made a lot of friends," Deb says. "We'll miss seeing the people and talking to everyone."

The DeShongs have already found local buyers for the store who plan to keep the business up and running. So, it looks like the corner store near Needmore will continue to serve not only as a convenient place to pick up necessities, but also as a cherished local landmark where news, gossip and good old country hospitality are exchanged. And those are things you can't get at Wal-Mart.

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