

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



A lot to catch up on

By Doug Roles, *Vice President, Member Services*

HAVING returned to Valley REC recently from a year-long military deployment, I've been catching up on exciting changes at the co-op. It seems change was the constant with our products, programs and services in the last 12 months.

I appreciate the co-op's support of my service with the Pennsylvania Army National Guard and the assistance I've received since returning to work, but I admit it's taken a while to get back up to speed. A lot happened in 2018!

Our president and CEO, Rich Bauer, provided members with an update on co-op happenings during February's series of nominating meetings (See story on next page). His reports to members also gave me a chance to get caught up. In case you missed it, here are some of the highlights:

Last summer, we mailed four-packs of LED lightbulbs to all our members, a first. Did you know replacing 60-watt incandescent bulbs with equivalent LEDs will cut the cost of lighting in an average home from \$260 per year to just \$26? That's a huge savings, for you and for the co-op's wholesale power bill.

The co-op's line crews in Shade Gap built a hot line demo trailer last year. It was used at two PennDOT safety events in the fall. The mobile trailer gives us the ability to bring the safety presentation right to your school or civic group.

Following a year of construction, and then moving supplies and equipment, our new Martinsburg office opened in January. Our new building is along Cove Mountain Road, just east of Martinsburg.

And Valley REC Energy Services, the electrical contracting arm of the co-op, began offering the GenerLink transfer switch last spring. These meter-mounted switches allow your portable generator to safely power your breaker box during an outage.

Late last year, Valley decided to change its billing cycle to more evenly distribute workload for our consumer service folks. Instead of billing everyone on the first of the month, we're now mailing bills by service district, starting with January's statements.

Also in 2018, after broadening our Youth Tour program, we had several students of non-member households attend. What a great experience for them! And it helps us spread the electric cooperative story to families that don't live on our lines.

It's bittersweet that the face(s) of the co-op are changing too, as a number of veteran employees moved on to well-deserved retirements. See page 14d for our farewell to a co-op communicator who retired last summer. Many readers will remember Valley's former vice president of consumer services and public relations, Luanne Eckenrode, either from her stories and photos in *Penn Lines*, her electrical safety presentations, or her involvement in civic groups and activities — not to mention a 30-year run of staffing the co-op's booth at county fairs.

Luanne was fond of the phrase "sea change" to describe rapid progress and new developments at the co-op. Looks like we were awash in change in 2018. ☀

Co-op holds nominating meetings in Districts 7, 8 & 9

By Doug Roles

Vice President, Member Services

IN FEBRUARY, Valley REC held nominating meetings in co-op Districts 7, 8 and 9. The nominees shown on the following page were selected to stand for election to the co-op board of directors at the annual meeting to be held Friday, April 5, at Huntingdon Area High School.

The meetings were held in Hustontown, Fulton County; Shade Gap, Huntingdon County; and Hollidaysburg, Blair County. Following the meal, VREC President & CEO Rich Bauer provided an update to the members on their cooperative. A question-and-answer period provided members an opportunity to raise concerns or get more information about a specific topic.

Rich thanked members for their cooperation with the co-op's rights-of-way trimming program. He said Valley maintains an aggressive vegetation management program.

"It's probably one of the most important things we do to keep the power on," Rich said. "We do it on a five-year cycle."

As usual at nominating meetings and the annual meeting, Rich thanked members for their participation in the co-op's demand response program. He asked members who don't have a

demand response unit to consider having the water heater switch installed to help lessen the co-op's electricity use during periods when demand is greatest. On average, each water heater switch saves about \$57 annually on the co-op's power bill.

"In 2018, we installed an additional 460 DRUs," Rich said. "The DRU total is 5,526, more than 25 percent of the membership. Most people say, 'We forget it's even there.'"

Rich also explained the co-op's new billing cycles. The old method of billing all accounts on the first of the month inundated the consumer services department with bill processing tasks. The new method of billing accounts by service district spreads out the workload.

Rich also noted that the co-op is now accepting applications for the Brighter Future scholarship program and is interviewing students for the annual Youth Tour to Washington, D.C. He reported the Community Service Grant Program handed out \$66,000 in assistance to civic projects and members struggling

with bill payments due to hardships. The grant program is funded through unclaimed capital credits refunds.

Rich reported Valley REC Energy Services is now in its third year. The new service specializes in small electrical jobs — such as security lighting, breaker replacement and water heater installation — that don't prove economically feasible for many local contractors.

"Our goal was to do the smaller jobs that a lot of electrical contractors don't do," Rich said.

Questions from members ranged from the mix of power sources the co-op uses to paperless billing to trimming of trees along service drops. Members were given an LED night light as a token of our appreciation for their attendance. 🌟



ABOVE: Members receive an update on their business at the District 9 meeting at West Loop Missionary Church, Hollidaysburg. Below: Nancy Bucher, assistant secretary for the Shade Gap District, takes note of Frank Robinson's name and winning ticket during the District 8 nominating meeting at the ladies auxiliary building in Shade Gap.



THE WINNER IS: Fraya Jukse, one of the youngest attendees at the District 7 meeting at the Hustontown fire hall, draws a raffle ticket for VREC President & CEO Rich Bauer. Three \$50 bill credits were given away at each nominating meeting.

2019 Valley REC board candidates

DISTRICT 7

Gregory M. Henry
599 Plum Hollow Road
Hustontown, PA 17229



Greg Henry worked for Valley REC for 39 years. He joined Valley as a laborer in February 1969 and retired in February 2008 as Valley's manager of operations. He also worked as a lineman, a crew chief and manager of what was then the Hustontown-Shade Gap District.

Greg is a 1965 graduate of Forbes Road High School. He served in the U.S. Army from 1966 to 1968 as a repair specialist in the Quartermaster Corps. While working for Valley REC, he completed the management internship program.

A native of Fort Littleton, Greg is a past director and past president of the Forbes Road Lions Club and currently serves as third vice president. He is a member of Clear Ridge United Methodist Church, where he serves as treasurer and is a member of the Pastor-Parish Relationship Committee and has previously served as a delegate to annual conference. Additionally, Greg is a trustee for the Clear Ridge Cemetery Association and is active with the Clear Ridge Community Association. Greg has previously served as a charter organization representative for Cub Scout Pack 47, Hustontown.

Greg and his wife, Erma, have three children, eight grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. He enjoys hunting, bicycling and spending time with the grandkids. Greg is also an avid reader. He has been a Valley member since 1972. Greg has received the Credentialed Cooperative Director Certificate, Board Leadership Certificate and Director Gold Credential, the highest level for directors. Greg is running unopposed on the ballot for District 7.

DISTRICT 8

Linda J. McMath
12007 Sawmill Road
Shade Gap, PA 17255



Currently, Linda McMath serves as tipstaff for the Huntingdon County Court of Common Pleas. She had also served a four-year term as jury commissioner, an elected position formerly utilized by county government.

Linda retired in 2004 as a reading specialist at Shade Gap Elementary School in the Southern Huntingdon County School District. She worked in education for 19 years, including 1 1/2 years in the Mifflin County School District. For 12 years, she operated McMath School of Gymnastics in Shade Gap and was a Level 7 rated gymnastic judge. Linda and her husband, Tom, own and operate Avalon of Shade Mountain, a guest house and event facility in Blairs Mills, Huntingdon County, which they spent 14 years restoring. They also operated a family farm in Taylor Township, Fulton County, for 25 years, raising beef, crops and Christmas trees.

For the past nine years, Linda has served on the Huntingdon County Children's Services Advisory Board. She has served nine years as a youth counselor at Tuscarora Catholic Summer Camp.

Linda is a 1965 graduate of Southern Huntingdon County High School and received her bachelor's degree in health and physical

education from Slippery Rock University in 1970. She holds a master's degree in education (as a reading specialist) from Shippensburg University.

Linda and Tom have been married since 1969. They have four children and six grandchildren. The McMaths attend St. Mary's Catholic Church, Shade Gap, where Linda has served as secretary of the pastoral council for 12 years. She enjoys sewing, horseback riding, refinishing furniture, refurbishing old houses and teaching her grandchildren how to sew.

Linda has been a Valley member since 1973. She has served two terms on the co-op board of directors. Linda has received the Credentialed Cooperative Director Certificate, Board Leadership Certificate and Director Gold Credential, the highest level for directors. Linda is running unopposed on the ballot for District 8.

DISTRICT 9

Cindy D. Bigelow
2548 William Penn Highway
Williamsburg, PA 16693



Williamsburg native Cindy Bigelow owns a 180-acre dairy farm. She retired in 2015 from Penn England Farms in Williamsburg. Her prior work experience includes six years with Leidy's Greenhouse in Williamsburg and 2 1/2 years as a baker with Brumbaugh's Old Fashioned Delites, also in Williamsburg.

A 1972 graduate of Central High School in Martinsburg, Cindy is a member of several cooperatives, such as Land O'Lakes and the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau. She serves on the Blair County Dairy Promotion Committee and the Farmland Preservation Committee of Blair County, and is involved with the Williamsburg Community Farm Show. For the past seven years, she has served on the Huntingdon/Blair County Farm Service Agency Committee.

Cindy has been a member of Fairview Church of the Brethren in Williamsburg for 49 years, where she has served as a deacon and a member of the church board. Her hobbies include making crafts, baking and collecting milk bottles.

Cindy and her late husband, Richard, were married 20 years. She has three children and six grandchildren. Cindy has been a Valley member since 1980. She has served five terms on the co-op board of directors. She currently serves as board secretary. She has received both the Credentialed Cooperative Director Certificate and the Board Leadership Certificate as well as the Director Gold Credential. Cindy is running unopposed on the ballot for District 9.

2019 Annual Meeting
7 p.m., April 5, 2019 - Huntingdon Area High School
Scenic territory slides - 6:30 p.m.
Elections - Districts 7, 8 & 9

Activities and a dairy presentation for the kids

Entertainment
Country Music Artist & The Voice Finalist
Josh Gallagher

Door prizes - Co-op gift certificates
1 - \$200 & 4 - \$100

\$20 OFF YOUR ELECTRIC BILL AND A GREAT NIGHT OUT! YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS IT!

Valley staffer looks forward to retirement filled with family, travel

By Doug Roles

Vice President, Member Services

LUANNE ECKENRODE was introduced to Valley REC members in a Meet Your Employees column in the December 1988 issue of *Penn Lines* magazine. As the co-op's new manager of member services and public relations, a good portion of Luanne's role as a co-op communicator for the next 30 years focused on using the co-op's local pages of *Penn Lines* to tell the Valley Rural Electric story.

Luanne retired as Valley's vice president of consumer services and public relations in July. The start and end of her co-op journey are vastly different.

"I knew nothing about the rural electric cooperative program," she recalls. "I thought everyone in the state was on Penelec."

Luanne was happily working for Mount Aloysius Junior College in Cresson, in alumni relations and fundraising, when a friend showed her an employment ad that looked like a good fit. Hired into a position that had been vacant for several months, Luanne's first challenge was to learn what her predecessor had done in the role and then to roll with the changes as the scope of her duties expanded.

Luanne and then-General Manager Doug Smith crafted the position to use Luanne's background in journalism and public speaking to focus on electrical and safety programs, and updating the co-op's publications — the long-running bi-monthly *Valley News* newsletter and the co-op's pages in *Penn Lines*.

Luanne says she learned a great deal about electric distribution and safety from the co-op's linemen while educating herself on electric cooperative products, programs, and services. She especially enjoyed meeting members and hearing their stories.

"That was all really exciting for me," she says. "I became a believer. I like the co-op concept. I was impressed with Valley's attention to the consumer. It was easier to do my job as a journalist when I believed in what we were doing."

Luanne experienced what she calls "sea change" in the way Valley REC communicated its message to members. Early on, typewriters were still in use. Layouts were done by hand and photo prints — developed at the co-op and later at photo processing centers — were mailed to the printer with the articles. The last step was waiting on the printer to send back proofs. Fax machines eventually sped up the process as did getting a computer.

"Things changed dramatically after that with digital photography and using the computer for more than word processing," Luanne says. "It's hard to imagine how we did the work back then."

Luanne's first article for *Penn Lines* was on auctioneer Dale Gibboney, then serving on the Valley REC board of directors. Her first piece for *Valley News*, in the January/February 1989 issue, featured the Globe Run Farm owned by the John A. Foster family.

Luanne oversaw the co-op's Brighter Future Scholarship program, participation in county fairs and the annual Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., and started the practice of serving meals to increase attendance at district nominating meetings. Hot line safety demos, participation in civic groups on behalf of the co-op, and development of a safety education program for firefighters created some long days in the office and on the road as Luanne lived the co-op principle of concern for community.

Luanne had a goal of using her undergraduate work in English and graduate studies in communication arts in the publish-



FUN TIME: Valley REC's former vice president of consumer services and public relations, Luanne Eckenrode, and her husband, Jim, pause for a photo at Portland Head lighthouse in Maine in August during a wedding anniversary trip. Luanne retired from the co-op in July with nearly 30 years of service.

ing industry in Manhattan. She says she never expected to stay at the co-op but says variety kept her work at Valley interesting.

"In the last decade of my career, they expanded my role to supervise what was then office services and billing, what was renamed consumer services," she says.

At the same time, a new position of energy specialist was created within the member services department. And the co-op entered the digital communications age with a website and later a social media presence.

"There was a lot of change," she says. "We built several substations, moved to the current corporate office and moved the Huntingdon District office to what had been the Shaner Energy building."

Her tenure also saw the construction of the current Shade Gap District office and the start of the newly-opened Martinsburg District office. Luanne says she enjoyed the various stages of her career, particularly the early years when she was crafting her position and making the job her own.

"Those were fun years because of all the learning and feeling like you could try new things," she says. "All the way through, I felt blessed to work with tremendous people, very dedicated people at Valley REC and at other co-ops, who were doing what was right for the business and the consumers."

Luanne and her husband, Jim, would like to purchase property in North Carolina and live there year-round but would be snowbirds initially because of family commitments. The last two years have seen the wedding of their oldest daughter, Jamie, and the arrival of a grandson, Dominic. Their younger daughter, Caroline, will be heading off to Penn State Altoona this fall.

Luanne hopes to pursue her passion for scenic photography and to take a class in photo matting. She has been greatly involved in her church and community, particularly with the Morrisons Cove Memorial Park, and plans to continue volunteering.

If the circumstances were right, she may go back to "work." Luanne has long thought that a dream retirement job would be serving as a tour guide.

"I think that would be fun," she says. "I like to travel and I like to talk with people." 🌞