

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



Dear future co-op

By Doug Roles, *Vice President of Member Services*

I RECENTLY read in another state's electric co-op magazine a piece about sixth-grade students who write letters to their future, high school senior selves. The letters are delivered by teachers, and students answer the questions they posed to themselves years earlier.

Questions range from what college or trade school the students decided to attend to do they still have a crush on a certain classmate or have they gotten the latest electronic gadget or a first vehicle.

A short documentary film, titled "Dear Future Me," chronicled a class of New Jersey students answering their letters. The point of the exercise is to give young adults some perspective, to show them how some things stay important while interest in other areas wanes.

If you're a bit beyond high school, there are also websites that facilitate sending a letter to your future self via email. You chose the date you want it to arrive in your inbox.

Writing to yourself sounds like an interesting exercise. If Valley REC's leaders were to write a letter to the future co-op, say the Valley REC a decade in the future, I'd bet that, as much as technologies and people might change, the basics will have stayed the same.

One questions in a letter to ourselves would be about tree trimming. And it's a good bet that we'll still be following an aggressive schedule that sees all of our rights-of-way trimmed over a five-year period. Doing so, now, helps lessen the chances of tree-related

outages in the future, whether it's next week or years down the road.

We could also ask our future selves about demand response and using electricity economically. "Do you still encourage members to shift their summertime use?" we could ask ourselves. Even with the rising popularity of home solar systems and increases in the efficiency of appliances, our future selves will likely still be reminding our future members about ways to save energy. For now, one way is to shift the use of major appliances — like ovens, clothes dryers and pool pumps — to early morning or late evening during the dog days of summer.

"Do you still put members first?" would be one of the biggest questions to ask of our future selves. As long as Valley REC is your local electric cooperative, that answer will be a resounding yes, because VREC is owned by those it serves. Similarly, we will have to answer yes if we ask ourselves if the co-op is still democratically controlled by members through nomination and election of directors to our board.

Any letters to our future selves would have to ask what the big changes have been. Perhaps you'll be reading this column on some kind of holographic projection. Or maybe a robotic assistant will read *Penn Lines* articles to you while you're charging up your electric flying car or waiting to catch a transporter beam to the office. Only time will fill in the details, but here's hoping the co-op's basics stay the co-op basics. 

Isett Heritage Museum tells the story of America's bygone days

By Doug Roles

Vice President of Member Services

VISITORS to Isett Heritage Museum near Huntingdon are sure to develop a deeper appreciation of the ingenuity and hard work of earlier generations of Americans. The museum's displays show the inventiveness and work ethic that enabled our ancestors to weather hard times and make the most of opportunities.

The museum is chock-full of everyday items from bygone days, from colonial-era hand tools and firearms to 19th-century farm implements and vintage radios. Isett Heritage Museum has about 60,000 items in its inventory and about 40,000 on display at any one time. There's something to catch anyone's interest, be it the display of military uniforms, the sticky doll or the replica deli counter from the 1950s.

Helping people connect to simpler times and better understand local history was the vision of museum founders Melvin and Beulah Isett, lifelong collectors of the antique and the unique.

Beulah passed away in 2000 but she shared her husband's dream of opening a museum. Isett — a 99-year-old Valley REC member well known for bringing the first cable TV service to the Huntingdon area — says his story begins with Beulah.

"I came to town (Huntingdon) in 1940, from the big town of Marklesburg," he jokes about the small hamlet 10 miles to the south. "I quit school in early 1940. What I did was I came to town, found a gal and got married."

Isett, known by friends and family as "Mel," and Beulah started Crossroads Grocery on the edge of Huntingdon Borough in a 16x20 building constructed from used lumber. Asked by the author what his grocery background was before opening his own store, Isett jokes: "Well, I ate every day."

Actually, he was somewhat familiar with the business, having worked as a teenager at Beaver's Grocery in Mar-



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

AMERICA'S PAST: Isett Heritage Museum's manager, Justina Hall, demonstrates a 1900s-era corn sheller. The museum, located on Valley REC lines near Huntingdon, displays more than 40,000 items of Americana.

klesburg, after a day in school that was preceded by a 4 a.m. start delivering milk for Fouse's Dairy. Both businesses closed many years ago.

Isett turned Crossroads Grocery into a general store. He moved his business into Huntingdon's downtown, at a Washington Street location adjacent Bernie Swartz's music store and across the street from the former Miller's department store.

"We sold all kinds of appliances," Isett remembers. "We expanded, we got into a little of everything."

Isett's store sold and repaired TVs and radios, erected antennas and sold

propane. If a customer was short of cash to pay a bill, Isett would work out a trade, often times for an antique or a radio that needed repaired.

To get his first inventory of televisions, Isett went to a Huntingdon bank, but his request for a \$500 loan was turned down. He then visited the manager of the Clover Farms store in Tyrone, Blair County, and explained his quandary. The manager vouched for Isett and sent him to a Tyrone bank, where he came away with a loan of \$2,000.

"The first bank didn't think TVs would sell," Isett remembers. "They thought they'd be a flash in the pan."

In 1960, Isett got a franchise for a cable TV business. He operated

PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES



YESTERDAY'S SHOWER: Before indoor plumbing, a pitcher and wash basin set was common on dressers and night stands across America. Water was poured onto a washcloth and bathers went head to toe, wringing the dirty water into the basin.

Huntingdon TV Cable until 1999 when he sold to Adelphia. All the while he and Beulah had been building their collection, frequently displaying items in the lobby of the cable company.

Isett Acres manager Justina Hall says Isett has often joked that he had a two-car garage that never saw cars and three apartments that never saw tenants because of the memorabilia he and Beulah had amassed.

In 2001, shortly after he retired, Isett opened his private collection to the public in a renovated barn on the museum property. In 2004, the museum expanded to include a 10,000-square-foot building. And in 2008, another, similar building was added.

The museum, which sits atop Stone Creek Ridge on a 189-acre farm, has operated as a not-for-profit foundation since 2005. Isett Acres Museum Foundation accepts new items on a limited basis.

“We get some strange things,” Isett says.

The museum was featured in Valley REC’s pages of *Penn Lines* magazine in March 2006, in a piece by contributor Sandie Biddle (Biddle has also written for *Pennsylvania Business Central* and *Centre Daily Times*). Since then, the museum’s staff has continued to expand offerings to visitors. One of

the most recent additions is a tin-smith shop where tourists can learn about the crimping and cutting of tin to make a variety of common items including the reflective backs of oil lamps and Christmas ornaments.

Hall works as a guide and is excited about the latest additions. She has a passion for sharing history, with those local to Huntingdon and visitors from farther away.

“We had a group come from Australia every year,” Isett says. “And another group from England.”

The COVID-19 pandemic caused the museum’s closure for three months in spring 2020 and then another four weeks in November 2020. The facility resumed normal hours in early April. Museum visitors are encouraged to stop by the lodge and gift shop. Isett enjoys seeing people enjoying the Isett collection. Meeting people has been a big part of his museum journey. When he turned 99, in February, he received 10,600 Facebook greetings.

“I sat here and watched them come in,” Isett says from his recliner next to the lodge’s large fireplace.

Staffed by 12 employees, the museum is open seven days a week. Three tour guides are available at all times, one for each building. Visitors are welcome to bring a lunch and use the picnic tables.

“It takes about two months before a guide is qualified to give a tour,” Hall

says. “We provide a lot of history of the Huntingdon area.”

Tourists will see early farm machinery, vintage electronics and household goods. Tour guides will demonstrate a 1900s corn sheller and a hand-powered grain blower, which uses a wooden fan to blow dirt and chaff from grain.

“We like to show how technologies have advanced over time,” Hall says. “These are just objects until we tell the story and bring them to life.”

The tour guides at Isett Acres help visitors have a better understanding of the time period in which the item was used. For example, a visitor might see a wooden tool chest and think it just held tools. But Hall explains that in the days before mass-produced plastic and metal toolboxes, the craftsmanship of a tool chest was a tradesman’s calling card. After all, how comfortable would you feel hiring a builder who couldn’t make a sturdy and attractive chest?

Similarly, the red and green coloring of a 1939 Coca Cola vending machine attests to the availability of green paint before the World War II effort. When the government took all the green paint for military use, the soft drink company moved to the familiar red and white color scheme. Who knew?

These stories and more await visitors who make the drive up Stone Creek Ridge Road. For more information, go online to www.isettacres.com or call 814-643-9600. ☀



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

ISETT HERITAGE MUSEUM: At left, museum founder Melvin Isett pauses for a photo with manager Justina Hall at the Isett lodge. The Isett Heritage Museum, above, is located about 1.5 miles north of Huntingdon.

Suds and savings

10 ways to save energy in the laundry room

By Abby Berry

YOUR CLOTHES washer and dryer account for a significant portion of energy consumption from major appliances, and let's face it — laundry is no one's favorite chore. Make the most of your laundry energy use!

There are several easy ways you can save energy (and money) in the laundry room. The Department of Energy recommends the following tips for saving on suds:

1. Wash with cold water. Switching from warm water to cold water can cut one load's energy use by more than half, and by using a cold-water detergent, you can still achieve that brilliant clean you'd normally get from washing in warm water.

2. Wash full loads when possible. Your washing machine will use the same amount of energy no matter the size of the clothes load, so fill it up if you can.

3. Use the high-speed or extended spin cycle in the washer. This setting

will remove more moisture before drying, reducing your drying time and the extra wear on clothing.

4. Dry heavier cottons separately. Loads will dry faster and more evenly if you separate heavier cottons like linens and towels from your lightweight clothing.

5. Make use of the "cool down" cycle. If your dryer has this cycle option, you can save energy because the clothes will finish drying with the remaining heat in the dryer.

6. Use lower heat settings to dry clothing. Regardless of drying time, you'll still use less energy.

7. Use dryer balls. Dryer balls, usually wool or rubber, will help keep clothes separated for faster drying, and they can help reduce static, so you can eliminate dryer sheets.

8. Switch loads while the dryer is warm. This allows you to take advantage of the remaining heat from the previous cycle.

9. Clean the lint filter after each



SCOTT VAN OSDOL

SAVE BIG: Switching from warm water to cold water can cut one load's energy use by more than half, and by using a cold-water detergent, you can still achieve that brilliant clean you'd normally get from washing in warm water.

drying cycle. If you use dryer sheets, remember to scrub the filter once a month with a toothbrush to remove excess buildup.

10. Purchase Energy Star®-rated washers and dryers. When it's time to purchase a new washer or dryer, look for the Energy Star label. New washers and dryers that receive the Energy Star rating use about 20% less energy than conventional models. 

Abby Berry writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR AFTER A STORM

When the skies clear and the birds sing, know that the storm's fury could have created **electrical hazards that you may or may not be able to see. Conditions in which stray electricity could energize the area, a person or objects include:**

DOWNED POWER LINES

- On the ground.
- Under storm debris.
- Draped over or touching a metal fence.
- Covered by standing water.
- Across or by the road.
- Hidden in tree branches.

OTHER POSSIBLE DAMAGE

- Drooping or sagging lines (never try to move one).
- Split or broken utility poles.
- Damage to a padmount transformer (green box).
- Lightning strike to a substation transformer.
- Damaged or unstable guy wires.

NEVER GO NEAR downed power lines or other damaged electrical equipment to assess damage or clean up the area. **STAY AWAY** and call 9-1-1 to report damage.

Power lines and other electrical equipment **do not have to be sparking, arcing (giving off a flame) or on fire to be energized.**

