

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



2022 off to a busy start

By Doug Roles, *Vice President of Member Services*

HAPPY NEW YEAR! We at Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) are looking forward to serving our members in 2022. Let's look at a few things the year has in store for us.

District nominating meetings

Your co-op's board is comprised of an elected director from each of Valley REC's nine director districts. Each year, three of those seats are up for election. Members in Districts 7, 8 and 9 will soon be receiving a mailing about their district nominating meetings, to be held in early February. At these fire hall dinners, members nominate candidates whose names appear on the ballot at April's annual meeting. Members also receive an update on co-op operations.

Solar panels

Last year, I was frequently asked about the co-op's role in residential solar systems. The trend is sure to continue in 2022. Valley REC has nearly 80 residential solar interconnections on its system. These interconnections are limited in capacity to not more than 110% of the member's normal household use. Members coordinate with the co-op to have the appropriate two-way metering installed. A "rolling bank" is then set up. If the member's system produces more electricity than what the property uses, our generation and transmission cooperative, Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc., in Harrisburg, pays the member for that electricity annually.

Generators

We work hard to maintain our distribution system, but outages do happen. We are often asked about generators. Residential standby generators — such as the Generac units offered through our service business, Valley Rural Energy Services (VRES) — start at several thousand dollars, kick on automatically, and can, depending on load, power an entire home. Another option, starting around \$700, is to have VRES install a meter-base GenerLink switch. This switch allows you to safely power several circuits in your home by using your portable, gasoline-powered generator.

Youth Tour and scholarships

The board of the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association has, reluctantly, decided not to participate in the National Rural Electric Association's Youth Tour 2022 to Washington, D.C., due to planning complications and tourism restrictions. Sadly, COVID-19 also canceled this event in 2020 and 2021. We are looking forward to a return to normal and getting to know local high school juniors through Youth Tour.

High school seniors and their parents will want to read our article on Page 12d. We will soon be accepting applications for our Brighter Future Scholarship Program. Applications must be postmarked by March 31.

As always, you can reach us at 800-432-0680. We wish you a year of growth and happiness. 🌸



ABOVE: Valley REC members Kevin and Trena Tharp pull a batch of iced Wiggle Butts dog treats from a dehydrator. The treats are available at several retail locations in Huntingdon and Fulton counties and can be ordered through the Wiggle Butts Baking Company's Facebook page.

Dog treat business has tails wagging

By Doug Roles

Vice President of Member Services

AN ENTREPRENEURIAL Hustontown couple doesn't mind if their best customers slobber a bit or shake their rear ends. They just want them to be healthy and happy while chowing down on Wiggle Butts Baking Company treats. Kevin and Trena Tharp, residents of Springfield Township, Huntingdon County, say Wiggle Butts products are fit for human consumption but baked with love with your dogs in mind.

Kevin and Trena, Valley REC members since 2006, began baking their own dog treats in 2019 as they were looking for healthier pet snacks for their goldendoodles (a golden retriever/poodle mix). They made the original snacks very small and used them as training treats. When they would sell a puppy, they'd give the new owner some of the treats for training.

"We just started making them ourselves," Kevin says. "We have treats in seven stores now."

Kevin, a machinist at Letterkenny Army Depot near Chambersburg, owns the business and operates the venture with assistance from Trena, who has years of customer service experience with humans. Trena managed the VFW post in Mount Union until 2013 and previously tended bar and booked events at the American Legion Country Club. She takes care of tracking Wiggle Butts inventory and ordering supplies.

Trena's physical activity is often limited due to recurrent back trouble, but she lends a hand as she is able. She quips that she and Kevin used to ride motorcycles together but now they bake.

"It's a joint effort," Kevin says of the baking. "It's something we can do together."

Wiggle Butts offers thin, cracker-like treats — with or without icing

— with little or no preservatives. And they're low in sugar. Healthy snacks are important for dogs because human food or sugary dog treats can cause pups to pack on pounds. Wiggle Butts treats come in peanut butter, oatmeal peanut butter and apple pumpkin peanut butter. They offer an iced peanut butter birthday cookie while their birthday cake is apple pumpkin peanut butter with a low-fat cream cheese icing and sugar-free maple syrup.

"Everything we make you can eat too," Trena says. "There's nothing in there that's bad for people or dogs. The apple pumpkin are really good."

A home-based dog treat business sounds like a lot of fun, especially with three taste-testing goldendoodles in residence, Baloo, Cleo and Kirby. But Kevin and Trena have learned firsthand there's a lot of paperwork and a process required to start a small business, especially one that feeds four-legged consumers.

Kevin had to register the business name and get a sales tax license. The state Department of Agriculture had to inspect his kitchen and a spare bedroom before granting Wiggle Butts a commercial feed license. In addition to working with an accountant, he had to find an insurance provider specializing in home-based businesses. Kevin even had to complete an online course on the spotted lanternfly so his distribution of Wiggle Butts products to stores would be less likely to spread the winged invader.

Kevin and Trena noted that their recipes for current Wiggle Butts products have state and federal ag department approval. New products with different ingredients or a new mix of ingredients would require further approval.

“It seems it’s a lot easier to cook for people than for pets,” Trena says. “If you want to try a new dish for people, you just whip it up. But for pets it has to be analyzed.”



ABOVE: With tail wagging, Baloo tells Trena Tharp he’d like a Wiggle Butts treat. As the mascot whose likeness is on the bag, the golden retriever doesn’t have to beg for long.



ABOVE: Kevin and Trena Tharp bake Wiggle Butts products in their kitchen and store ingredients and the finished product in a spare bedroom, which also houses equipment such as dehydrators. Record-keeping is key, and each bag has its own batch number.

“And if you change something, you have to get it reanalyzed,” Kevin adds.

Kevin says the challenge now is determining how to grow the business without outpacing production capability. Kevin and Trena check with their stores every two weeks to see how much inventory has moved. They’ve been getting the Wiggle Butts name out there through social media and attending craft shows, including the Fulton Fall Folk Festival in October and events in Hustontown and Mount Union in November.

Record-keeping is a big part of the production process. Trena tracks the dates of each batch and the ingredients used. Each product has its own numerical identifier as does each batch. Kevin and Trena store products in their home, being sure to move product in the order it was made.

“The bagged treats and cookies have a shelf life of one year,” Trena says. “But we want them to be fresh.”

Wiggle Butts treats are for sale at: Peight’s Country Store, Mount Union; Sandy Ridge Market, Orbisonia; Walker’s Homestead Goods, Rockhill; Three Springs Mini Mart; McLaughlin’s Drug Store, McConnellsburg; H&G’s



ABOVE: A custom cake is the centerpiece of any puppy party. Wiggle Butts Baking Company can provide an attractive and pet-friendly treat. Cakes should be ordered two weeks ahead of your dog’s big day.

Bubbles and Bath Pet Grooming, McConnellsburg; and Nemaocolin Wooland’s Pet Resort and Spa, Fayette County, where their daughter is employed. Wiggle Butts goodies have gone to dogs across the state through word of mouth. A Philadelphia pooch is enjoying them through a family friend.

“From everything we’ve heard so far, everybody loves them,” Trena says.

You can visit Wiggle Butts Baking Company on Facebook or call Kevin and Trena at 814-599-4146. Wiggle Butts can also be reached via email at wigglebuttsbakingco@gmail.com 🌸

Scholarship application season begins

VALLEY Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) will award up to fifteen \$1,000 scholarships this year to eligible students who qualify. The money to fund this scholarship program comes from unclaimed capital credits refunds that previously had to be turned over to the state. Thanks to the efforts of our political advocates, we can now keep those funds in our local communities.

Eligibility requirements

- The applicant must be:
- ▶ an active Valley REC member or dependent of an active member. (Valley REC directors and employees and their dependents are not eligible.)
 - ▶ attend or plan to attend an accredited post-secondary institution.
 - ▶ enrolled or planning to enroll full-time for the 2021-2022 academic year. Previous Brighter Future scholarship recipients are not eligible.

How to apply

Applications will be available at the end of January on the co-op's website. Visit valleyrec.com and follow the "Programs and Services" link to the "Scholarships" section.

There are two versions of the application: one for high school students and one for high school graduates.

Applications are also available at all Valley REC offices and in the guidance offices of the following public high schools:



- Altoona Area High School
- Central High School
- Claysburg-Kimmel High School
- Fannett-Metal High School
- Forbes Road Junior/Senior High School
- Hollidaysburg Area Senior High School
- Huntingdon Area High School
- Juniata High School
- Juniata Valley High School
- McConnellsburg High School
- Mifflin County High School
- Mount Union Area High School
- Northern Bedford County High School

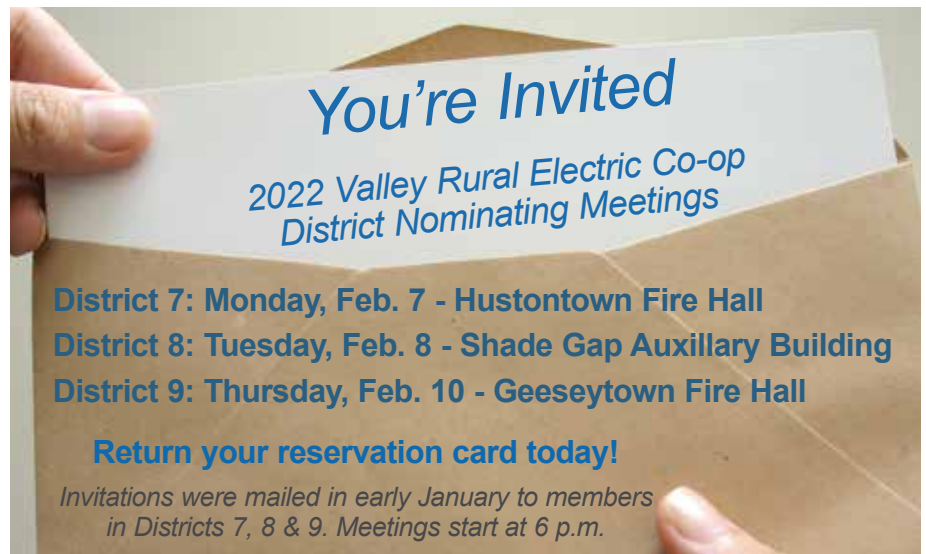
- Southern Fulton Junior/Senior High School
- Southern Huntingdon County High School
- Tussey Mountain High School
- Tyrone Area High School
- Williamsburg High School

Application deadline

Applications and all required information must be delivered to a Valley Rural Electric Cooperative office or be postmarked by March 31.

Scholarship selections will be made in late April. Award recipients will be notified by the end of June.

Please direct questions to member-services@valleyrec.com or call 800-432-0680. ☘



Stop & slow

Journeyman Lineman Bill Bogel, a crew leader in Valley REC's Martinsburg district, simulates directing traffic through a work zone. Lineworkers and other personnel in Valley's Martinsburg, Huntingdon and Shade Gap districts completed flagger training (provided by the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association's Job Training & Safety Program) in November. Certification is good for two years and is completed through a mix of classroom instruction and hands-on training. The training covered topics such as use of cones, proper signage, required reflective apparel, single-flagger and dual-flagger work zones and treatment of emergency vehicles approaching a work zone. Motorists can help keep work zones safe by slowing down, turning on headlights and paying attention to instructions from flaggers.

