

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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Get the Energy-Use Picture with an In-Home Audit



TRAVIS KUSHTOS

WINTER IS IN FULL SWING, and the cold weather typically results in higher energy bills. Since Pennsylvanians use the most electricity in winter, we'd like to remind you about a co-op service to help you boost efficiency and save money.

As your trusted energy partner, we believe there's always room for improvement when it comes to saving energy. That's why Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) offers home energy audits. An energy audit provides an overall view of your home's efficiency. Understanding how your home uses energy can help determine the best ways to adjust energy consumption, improve problem areas and ultimately keep more money in your wallet.

If a member contacts me about bills that seem abnormally high or some other consumption-related matter and we can't get the issue resolved over the phone, I suggest an in-home audit. There is no cost to the member, just an investment of time — normally one to three hours.


Before even leaving the office, I start the energy audit by reviewing the member's account. I look for any seasonal loading, determine base load (the average minimum amount of electricity used in the home) and look for any trouble periods. It takes about an hour and is well worth the time. Normally, I can look at someone's consumption history and learn a lot — if the household has growing kids or aging appliances. I can even make an educated guess about the HVAC system. Of course, I'm making assumptions because I can't truly know until I meet with the member.

The first thing I do in the home is sit down with the member to review what I've gathered about the account. Next, we walk through the home together. I look at doors and windows and ask about insulation. I always take note of the appliances in the home, the age of heating and cooling systems, and conduct a room-by-room assessment. I ask questions about energy use and habits. Are lights normally left on? Does someone in the house sleep with a fan running? Has any caulking or weather stripping been installed?

I often use a thermal camera to detect heat loss invisible to the naked eye. Members are often surprised to see just how many cold spots a home may have.

I also take note of how sun, shade and prevailing winds affect the structure. Additionally, as a Building Performance Institute-certified energy auditor, I make safety a top concern. If I see something unsafe during an in-home audit, I inform the member. Energy auditors are taught to be alert to hazards, such as mold, bulk moisture and any kind of combustion (fire) issues.

To conclude the energy audit, I leave the member with a list of recommendations, especially for low-cost/no-cost fixes. Ultimately, the member has to weigh long-term savings against the cost of home improvements. Often, the best course is to start with the lowest-cost items while planning for larger improvements.

There's no magic wand to becoming more energy efficient. But an energy audit can help form an accurate picture of how your home uses energy. 

TRAVIS KUSHTOS

ENERGY SPECIALIST/DEMAND RESPONSE PROGRAM MANAGER

Graystone Cottage Community is New Village on VREC Lines

DOUG ROLES, VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBER SERVICES

DEVELOPMENT OF AN over-55 community in northern Huntingdon County is nearing completion as tenants move into the last single-family homes to be erected on the 81-unit property. The Graystone Cottage Community near Spruce

Creek represents a significant new load for Valley Rural Electric Cooperative's (REC) distribution system and provides hassle-free living in a scenic setting for occupants. Jeff S. Long Construction, a builder specializing in senior-living

apartment buildings, is the developer.

Valley REC's work to connect electric service to Graystone homes on the 70-acre parcel wrapped up earlier this year. The cottage community is the first single-family home development for Long Construction, which also operates multi-story buildings in Bedford, Hollidaysburg, Bellefonte and Huntingdon. The new housing community is located just off Route 45 in Morris Township.

"Everybody's really happy with it; they just love their homes," says Jeff Long, a Valley REC member. "We're happy with it. We were shocked at how quickly the units pre-leased. Most were leased before the homes were set."

Jeff says most tenants are seniors who were looking to downsize or who have sold their homes and moved to the area from Tyrone, State College, and Altoona. There are also a few "snowbirds," who head south in the winter. Jeff says the scenic setting is a big draw. He describes the location as "out in the country, but only 10 to 15 minutes from town."

The 1,600-square-foot homes have two bedrooms and two bathrooms and are situated on one-third-acre lots. The manufactured-housing units feature an open floor plan and front and back porches. An attached two-car garage is accessed through a utility/laundry room adjacent to the kitchen. Rental includes water, sewer, cable TV and trash service.

"We do all the maintenance," Jeff explains. "We do the snow plowing and lawn care."

Tenants will enjoy high-efficiency appliances, including LED lighting and Rheem heat pump water heaters.

"We installed the hyper-efficient Mitsubishi heat pumps," Jeff says of the HVAC systems in the homes.

Graystone also provides tenants with a common gathering space



GOOD LOOKS: Valley Rural Electric Cooperative Crew Leader Greg Dilling, right, and Journeyman Lineman Ryan Dodson inspect a pad-mounted transformer at the Graystone Cottage Community.



ENTER HERE: The entrance to the over-55 community is along Route 45, near Spruce Creek in Huntingdon County.



and fitness center called Sage Creek Lodge, which hosts weekly activities and can be rented for events.

“We have an outdoor pavilion with a pickleball court,” Jeff says. “And we’re installing a pond.”

Jeff anticipates the final site work will be completed in June. The first Graystone tenants began moving in over the summer of 2021, but planning by the cooperative to provide electric service goes back a few years earlier.

“I staked that job as one of my first big projects back in 2008-2009, when I was a staking engineer in the Huntingdon district,” says Mike Lansberry, Valley REC’s Martinsburg district manager. “It is like a small town basically.”

Staking work shows a builder or developer how electric lines will reach various buildings. Electricity is provided to the Graystone community by the north feeder of the co-op’s Williamsburg substation.

“It’s all underground service in there; primary underground was installed three years ago,” Mike says. “As the houses are being installed, we pull in secondary lines and connect them to our meters.”

Mike says the original single-phase service to the development has been

MOUNTAIN VIEW: The 81 homes in the Graystone development feature two bedrooms, two baths, an attached garage and a view of the surrounding mountains.

converted to three-phase for better power quality and reliability. The line enters the development from Route 45, and the co-op can reroute power to the development if an outage affects the normal power supply.

For cooperatives that serve still mostly rural areas, the relatively sudden addition of 80 or more meters through a development represents as much growth as parts of the service

territory would see in many years. Planning and communication between the contractor and the co-op is key.

“Valley has been really good to work with,” Jeff says.

More information about Graystone Cottage Community and Jeff S. Long Construction can be found at graystonecourt.com/portfolio/cottage-community.



SPACIOUS LAYOUT: The homes in the Graystone development feature an open floor plan.

PHOTO COURTESY JEFF S. LONG CONSTRUCTION

Meet Your Employees

DOUG ROLES, VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBER SERVICES

FEATURED IN THIS COLUMN IS a new member of the Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) team, Curt Wilson, who works from the co-op's Shade Gap district office as a second-year lineman. He lives in Hill Valley, Huntingdon County, and is a 2010 graduate of Mount Union Area High School.

Curt came to Valley REC with a variety of work experience. Following high school, he spent several years working for his grandfather, Tom Hancock, at his contracting business. Curt did remodeling jobs, additions and decks. He next worked for Kyfus Metals, a rolled-metal roofing supply store in McVeytown.

"I delivered metal and worked in the shop," Curt recalls. "It was a neat experience, but I worked mostly indoors."

Curt also worked for Hickes Associates, Alexandria, and then Morgan Excavating, Hill Valley. He enjoyed the variety of work.

"We did a lot of concrete work, and I did some excavating," he says of his time with Hickes, a general contractor. "We did some work for sewage treatment plants, and I actually started doing the pad for the [Valley REC] Path Valley substation."

Curt got to do some strip mine reclamation work with Morgan Excavating in Hazleton, Shamokin and Snowshoe. He recalls one pit site that was 180 feet deep. In addition to moving dirt, the reclamation work included re-planting former mine areas.

"We planted trees on some of it, and we hydro-seeded," he says. "In Snowshoe, we planted 24,000 trees by hand. It was a mix of pine and oak."

Whenever work slowed down, Curt would look for additional opportunities, not wanting to be laid off for long. He worked in excavating and concrete construction about seven years and had applied to Valley REC while working with Hickes. Then the



TEAM PLAYER: Curt Wilson of Hill Valley, Huntingdon County, works from Valley Rural Electric Cooperative's Shade Gap district as a second-year lineman.

retirement of lineworkers in the Shade Gap district gave Curt an opening to join the cooperative's team.

"For me, it was a totally new type of work," he says. "I thought it would be interesting to learn something new. I have no regrets."

Curt has attended the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association's Job Training & Safety schools for pole climbing, basic and intermediate gloving and sticking (working with energized wire by using rubber gloves and insulated fiberglass poles), and chainsaw safety.

"I enjoy being outside and being

able to keep people in power," he says.

When not working, Curt enjoys hunting and riding dirt bikes with family. His wife, Cassandra, works as a nail technician. They have two boys, who are 4 years and 9 months old.

Curt has family in the Hill Valley area and in Orbisonia. He said one of the things he likes about the co-op is working close to home.

"Previously, I was hours from home and living out of a suitcase," he says.

We're glad Curt only uses his luggage for vacations now. He's one of the people you can count on. 📍

BEST BETS FOR Winter Savings

Energy consumption spikes during winter months as we spend more time indoors and heating systems work overtime. You can help reduce demand and strain on the electric grid by conserving during peak energy times. Reducing energy use will also help lower your energy bills.

- UNPLUG WHEN POSSIBLE**
Turn off unnecessary lights and electronics when you aren't using them.
- ELIMINATE DRAFTS AND AIR LEAKS**
Seal air leaks and drafts around windows and exterior doors.
- USE APPLIANCES WHEN ENERGY DEMAND IS LOWER**
Run large appliances like clothes washers, dryers and dishwashers early in the morning or before you go to bed.
- MAINTAIN HEATING EQUIPMENT**
Maintain your heating system by replacing dirty, clogged filters and scheduling an annual inspection for necessary maintenance.
- LOWER THE THERMOSTAT**
Home heating accounts for a large portion of energy consumption. Adjust your thermostat to the lowest comfortable setting (68 degrees or lower).