

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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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

James Stauffer
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Allegheny Director

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Corporate Office Hours
Monday - Thursday
7 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Huntingdon/Martinsburg/Shade Gap
Office Hours
Monday - Thursday
7 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Outages & Emergencies
1-800-432-0680

Members Are the Power Behind Our Cooperative



RICH BAUER

FEBRUARY SIGNIFIES THE START OF the democratic election process for Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC). Each year, Valley REC holds district nominating meetings in three of our nine districts to select who will be on the ballot at this year's annual meeting in April.

Unlike at investor-owned utilities, our members select the neighbors they want to represent them on the board of directors for a three-year term. Every board member is a neighbor who receives service from Valley REC and looks out for the best interests of the cooperative that serves them.

That is the big difference between cooperatives and other utilities. Most for-profit companies only look out for the bottom line and how much they can return to their investors, who are usually scattered throughout the world. Their concern isn't local; it is for making the most money for their stock value. Valley REC was created in 1939 when a group of landowners decided that enough was enough. Since investor-owned utilities didn't want to serve the rural population because there wasn't any profit in it, members of the community decided to form their own electric provider to serve all members in the area, not just a select few.

Valley REC is governed by a group of nine members, one from each of the districts that makes up the cooperative's service territory. Each board member serves a three-year term, which are staggered so three directors are up for election each year. This year, Districts 7, 8, and 9 are up for election. If you reside in any of those areas, you should have received an invitation to the nominating meeting that will be held in your district.

The name of the candidate(s) nominated at these area meetings will be placed on the ballot at the April annual meeting for all members to vote on. The directors for the cooperative are truly looking out for the best interests of their neighbors, not for a profit. If the cooperative makes a profit, we assign those margins to the members according to their usage and return that money in the form of capital credits.

Each November, the board elects to return the margins from previous years back to the membership in the form of a bill credit, if you are still a member of Valley REC, or a check, if you no longer receive service from the cooperative. Over the past four years, we have returned, on average, \$2 million annually to our consumer-members. Our goal is to make only the money needed to keep the cooperative functional. Anything more must be returned to the membership.

The electricity industry is very unstable right now. Many power plants are closing and fewer are coming online to replace them. I want to assure you that we are working tirelessly to make sure the power you need will be there when you flip the switch.

I hope to see many of you at the district nominating meetings. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to give me a call, send an email, or stop in. Take care, and God bless. 🙏

RICH BAUER
CEO

Going Country: Former Urban Entrepreneurs Enjoy Event Venue, Cottage Rental Business in Rural Huntingdon County

DOUG ROLES, VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBER SERVICES

THE OWNERS OF A NEW entertainment hall served by Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) are excited to be hosting a variety of events on the grounds of their cabin rental business near Raystown Lake.

Bob and Monique Payne have been helping guests create memories since the grand opening of Moe's Mountainside Entertainment Venue last summer and the reopening of a local campground in 2017.

The event center is the latest construction project at Urban Saddle Ranch, a cottage camping venture that brought the Paynes to rural Huntingdon County from Pittsburgh eight years ago while Monique was looking for open space and horses.

"I want parties and weddings; I want people to have fun," Monique says of her vision for the event venue. "It's open for everything. This is country fun."

"Country" wasn't part of the Paynes' day-to-day life before their big move. They met in 2009. Bob was balancing several business ventures plus his job as a bus driver with the Port Authority of Allegheny County (now Pittsburgh Regional Transit). Monique, a New York City native, was operating a 3,000-square-foot beauty salon she owned in Wilkes-Barre. Monique moved to Pittsburgh



DOUG ROLES

ENTREPRENEURIAL COUPLE: Bob and Monique Payne pause for a photo in the loft of Moe's Mountainside Entertainment Venue. From Pittsburgh and New York City, respectively, the couple moved to the Huntingdon area in 2016, where they reopened a cottage rental business near Raystown Lake before opening the event venue last year.

but told Bob from the start that she wanted a lifestyle change.

"I drove a school bus for years," she recounts of working in Pittsburgh. "But I kept saying, 'I'm going country. I'm going to have my animals.'"

"She loves horses," Bob confirms. "She wanted some land."

The Paynes drove throughout Pennsylvania on weekends looking for that just-right property. They found it in 2016.

"I said, 'Find a place we can turn into a business,'" Bob recalls,

admitting he didn't expect that Monique would find something that checked all their boxes.

"Of all the places we visited, I remembered Raystown Lake ringing a bell," he says.

"He used to come up here fishing," Monique explains. "When we saw this property, it had all the things we wanted."

The Urban Saddle property is the former Ripka's Cottages camp off Henderson Hollow Road, Juniata Township. The property had been



URBAN SADDLE RANCH



URBAN SADDLE RANCH

IDYLIC SETTING: The cottages at Urban Saddle Ranch feature many amenities. The property sat idle for about eight years before it reopened. In addition to owners Bob and Monique Payne, full-time ranch residents include a variety of horses, pigs, and turkeys.

idle for about eight years since the passing of former owner Bill Ripka, and the cabins had deteriorated.

“They had shag carpeting and squirrels. Some of these cabins, originally, were by the old lake,” Monique says, noting their location prior to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dam project.

“I give her all the credit for that vision,” says Bob, who retired in 2020. “I was along as supporting cast, but it’s been good.

“I’m a city guy, kind of had a cushy job,” Bob adds, “but over time, I caught on to this type of living. You just have to adjust. I used to see 600 people a day; now I feed horses in the morning. My life is totally different.”

Bob has friends who think he’s crazy but says “because I’ve been an entrepreneur all my life, they understand that part.”

“My list is long,” Bob adds. “I had a business. I’m an inventor. I also did concert promotions, a lot of R&B and a lot of rock. Most [bands] were local; some were national.

“My invention was a bacteria killer that was built for buses and trains,” Bob explains of the filtration system he offered to the Minneapolis-based company Thermo King. “I had the idea. I just had to find the right people. They had a team of engineers; I traveled to trade shows to promote the product.”

The Paynes now promote get-away experiences with their rural cottage rentals and a unique space for birthdays, anniversaries, and other milestones. Having cabins co-located with the new event center provides the opportunity for out-of-town guests to stay on-site. The Paynes also hope to host live music events as well as corporate gatherings at the 40-by-80-foot venue.

The Paynes purchased the property in late 2016 while still working their full-time jobs. They were fortunate to get some long-term renters quickly. In spring 2017, a traveling nurse working for a pipeline company found the



PLENTY OF SPACE: Moe's Mountainside Entertainment Venue, near Huntingdon, opened in August 2024 and can seat 110 guests.



DOUG ROLES

cottages on the Huntingdon County Visitors Bureau listing. She spread the word to other pipeline workers.

“The next day, all my cabins were rented for the next two years,” Monique recalls, saying the rentals came at the right time in relation to business expenses. “We were going from nickels and dimes.”

Bob and Monique have poured a lot of work into their grounds and cabin renovations. Boards from trees cleared off the property were used for a burnt lumber interior motif that Monique terms “shabby chic.” They were also used for headboards for beds and exterior skirting for the cabins.

Moe's Mountainside Entertainment Venue features a stage, loft and kitchen area. The venue can seat 110 guests. Urban Saddle's nine cabins are fully furnished and have electric and plumbing. They feature outdoor grill stations, decks and picnic tables. Visitors only need to bring toiletries and towels. Cabins can accommodate from four to eight visitors.

Bob and Monique made multiple trips with a horse trailer to move animals and furniture to the property. The Paynes had small outbuildings built for animals and in 2020 built a large horse barn.

Visitors will enjoy seeing horses, ducks, cats, pigs, turkeys and a peacock that call the ranch home. Future plans include construction of a trail for horseback riding and hiking on the 150-acre property.

The Paynes have made many new friends during their time in the area, and they've worked with several local contractors, including Terry Cohenour of Mill Creek, who did excavation work for the event center. Stewart Concreting did the flooring, and Kuhstos Construction completed framing and interior finishes. Randa's Rustic Sinks provided country-style plumbing for the restroom and the kitchen.

“Huntingdon has been good to us,” Monique reflects. “The people are nice. The land is just beautiful out here.” 📍

Co-op Now Accepting Scholarship Applications

VALLEY RURAL ELECTRIC Cooperative (REC) will award up to thirty-five \$1,000 scholarships this year to eligible students. 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 communities.

Eligibility requirements

The applicant must be:

- ▶ a dependent of an active Valley REC member
- ▶ a high school senior (public, private, charter, cyber or home-school) planning to enroll full-time at an accredited post-secondary institution or trade/

technical school for the 2025-2026 academic year

Note: Previous Brighter Future scholarship recipients are not eligible.

How to apply

Applications are available at valleyrec.com. Follow the “Programs and Services” link to the “Scholarships” section. Applications will also be 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 REC 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 brighterfuture@valleyrec.com or call 800-432-0680. 📞



SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS CONTINUE IN BUSY 2025

2025 has brought plenty of work to keep the co-op's operations personnel busy. Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) Vice President of Operations Todd Ross says several system improvement projects are planned in addition to normal service work and outage response.

This year does not include a substation construction project. The cooperative has replaced five 1950s-era substations since 2016, including one in Three Springs, Huntingdon County, in 2024.

"At the Puzzletown substation, we'll be redoing the 46-kilovolt (kV) delivery point," Todd says of upcoming work in western Blair County. "That includes replacing an aging substation recloser with a newer, more advanced breaker. There's no change to the voltage."

In southern Huntingdon County, work will continue to convert the south feeder (main line) of the new Three Springs substation to 25 kV to improve power quality and reliability. Crews from the co-op's Martinsburg and Huntingdon service districts will assist Shade Gap district crews at times.

Since the co-op's first lines were energized in 1939, Valley REC's system has grown to include more than 2,700 miles of line and 23 substations. Todd says work will continue across the system to replace aging wire, some of which is original to the system. The new all-aluminum wire offers increased capacity without increasing wire weight between poles, which would have required the placement of additional poles and hardware.

"The span lengths can stay the same," Todd says, "and the



GETTING READY: Journeyman Lineman Ryan Dodson prepares to thread wire into buried conduit in Frankstown Township, Blair County. Valley Rural Electric Cooperative crews pulled wire through nearly 800 feet of pipe to bring service to the site of a new home on a wooded hillside, meeting the co-op's mission of providing power to even the most remote rural areas.

[aluminum wire] has plenty of capacity for decades to come. There's no steel strand in it that rusts, like [the type of wire used before]."

The co-op's district managers and staking engineers will be busy with design work to plan system improvements for the next several years. The process includes developing project budgets and figuring out what materials – poles, wires and electrical equipment – will be required.

"We have a lot of pole replacement to do from deteriorating poles identified during our 2024 pole inspections," Todd explains. "Tree trimming and pole testing will be ongoing throughout the year."