

# Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives  
serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

## VALLEY RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

10700 Fairgrounds Road  
P.O. Box 477  
Huntingdon, PA 16652-0477  
814-643-2650  
1-800-432-0680  
www.valleyrec.com

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**James Stauffer**  
Chairman  
Allegheny Director

**Leroy Barnes**  
Vice Chairman  
PREA Director

**Cindy Bigelow**  
Secretary

**Randall Huntsman**  
Treasurer

**Gregory Henry**  
**Linda McMath**  
**Kenneth Soder**  
**Kevin States**  
**Joanne Whitsel**

**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

## Will There Be Enough ...



**RICH BAUER**

**USUALLY, EVERYONE HAS ONE** or two things on their mind that they constantly worry about. When they lie down to sleep, those thoughts run through their head and keep them up at night. Sometimes, it is finances, relationships, family, etc., but what keeps me up at night is wondering if there is going to be enough power to keep the lights on for our membership.

Now, I don't want to alarm anyone — we are not going to have rolling blackouts anytime soon — but if energy trends continue, I could honestly see a major shortage of power within the next five years. Many industry experts feel the same.

These experts point to our voracious appetites for all kinds of watts — kilowatts, megawatts, gigawatts — and to head-scratching energy policies that are driving traditional resources like coal and natural gas plants off the grid faster than new resources can come on-line. Throw in the influx of data centers throughout the Northeast, and our energy grid can't keep up with the demand for power.

Data centers — computer-driven hubs that satisfy our fascination with the worldwide web — consume large amounts of energy. Most people can't comprehend how one building can demand 10 times the power that Valley Rural Electric Cooperative's (REC) entire system uses.

While steps are being taken to address the energy imbalance at state and national levels, some damage has already been done, resulting in higher costs to deliver electricity. Lots of factors are at play, but for members wondering what this means for their household budgets, it's important to understand PJM Interconnection (PJM), its recent capacity auction and the anticipated impact on our rates.

PJM oversees the multi-state power grid that Valley REC is plugged into and coordinates the flow of electricity from generators to local utilities like ours. It also operates energy markets and plans for future grid needs. Each year, PJM hosts a capacity auction to ensure it has enough electricity to meet peak demand in the future.

Recently, in reaction to increased demand and tightened supply, capacity market prices didn't just increase, they skyrocketed — by more than 800% for the 2025-2026 delivery year. And for consumers across the grid, that signals one thing: potentially higher electric bills.

Fortunately, Valley REC gets its energy from Allegheny Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Allegheny), which we own and operate along with 12 other rural electric cooperatives in Pennsylvania and one in New Jersey. Over the decades, the Allegheny board, overseen by directors from each of these 14 cooperatives, has made forward-thinking investments in energy resources, including nuclear and hydropower plants, that today provide nearly 67% of the electricity we distribute to our members.

These assets are important because they shield us — and you — from the energy market's volatility, including the extremes we've seen and will likely continue to see on capacity pricing. Neighboring investor-owned utilities buy 100% of their energy on the open energy market, making them and their rates vulnerable to that volatility. Our exposure, however, is limited because our supplier, Allegheny, only needs to buy about 33% of our energy needs from outside sources. And with long-term power-purchase contracts in place to further manage risk, we've set the stage for additional price stability.

As a result, Allegheny offers some of the lowest, least-volatile generation rates in the PJM region — and that's not going to change when the 2026 numbers are set later this

*Continued on page 14D*

# Songwriter's New Music Fills Old McCoysville Church

**DOUG ROLES**, VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBER SERVICES

**NEW MUSIC IS BEING MADE** in an old church in McCoysville since singer/songwriter Conrad Fisher bought the building and converted it into a recording studio and concert venue, dubbed Ragamuffin Hall.

The 1871 Presbyterian edifice in Juniata County once echoed with hymns. Now, Conrad uses the space to create his own material and to help aspiring country and gospel artists record their music or play it live in the nave upstairs. Some of the music made there has reached all the way to Nashville and the Grand Ole Opry.

"I feel like I'm in the top half-percent of musicians anywhere," Conrad says of being able to make a living in music in such a rural setting. "To be able to do this in Juniata County is a dream come true."

## Making music on his terms

Conrad, a Valley Rural Electric Cooperative member, defined his dream at an early age. But it was a winding path that took him from his Lancaster County Mennonite origins to "Music City" and then to Walnut in Juniata County, where he settled in 2014. He married his wife, Beth, in 2015, and the couple now has three children — Jack, 3, Elsa, 2, and infant Eve.

"When I was 18, I had a goal to work for myself in the music industry and be home for breakfast, lunch, and supper," says Conrad, who was named Central Pennsylvania Music Hall of Fame's 2020 and 2021 Songwriter of the Year.

In 2021, his song, "Living Left to Do," recorded by Joe Mullins and the Radio Ramblers, spent four weeks at No. 1 on the bluegrass and gospel charts. One of Conrad's most memorable moments was hearing the tune performed live on the Grand Ole Opry stage.

When The Oak Ridge Boys released their "Mama's Boys" album in tribute to mothers in October 2024, it included Conrad's song, "Momma Sang for Me," which he penned specifically for the project. Conrad wrote the song in December 2022, the day after his publisher told him about the album and asked if he had any songs to contribute. The recording and release process spanned nearly two years until Oak Ridge Boy Duane Allen contacted Conrad to say the tune would make the album.

"You don't have to chase good news," Conrad says of submitting his song and then trying to forget about it. "You always have to swing the bat. Duane with the Oaks loved the song."



**19TH CENTURY CHURCH:** The former McCoysville Presbyterian church was built in 1871. It is located in Tuscarora Township, Juniata County.

Conrad says there's "something very validating" about having his songs recorded by artists he admires. He's grateful to be part of the Nashville scene, but from 500 miles away.

## A guitar and a dream

Conrad's father grew up Amish but left that community at age 18. When Conrad was 6, the family joined a more relaxed church that allowed music.

"My uncle gave me a guitar that had drywall screws holding the neck on, a really sad piece, but I learned to play on it," Conrad recalls.

At age 12, Conrad's dad got him another guitar, and he continued to teach himself while using an old tobacco barn as a recording space. In addition to guitar, Conrad plays piano, bass, autoharp, harmonica, ukelele and some drums.

"I don't remember not being able to play keys," he says.

As he finished high school, Conrad didn't believe he was talented enough to pursue songwriting and music. Instead, he planned to get a degree in audio engineering and production to find work in Nashville. To that end, he took some general education classes at Penn State's Lewistown location.



**SPACIOUS STUDIO:** Recording artist Conrad Fisher spends much of his time at Ragamuffin Hall, the studio he set up inside an old McCoysville church.





DOUG ROLES

**UPCOMING SHOWS:** Conrad Fisher looks over the pews on the second floor of Ragamuffin Hall. The nave of the former Presbyterian church is now used as a concert venue.



DOUG ROLES

**HOWDY NEIGHBOR:** Conrad Fisher and Melba Campbell, Valley Rural Electric Cooperative members who live in Tuscarora Township, Juniata County, pause for a photo at the Walnut Cheese Nook. Conrad knows many of the patrons who stop by the country store/restaurant, which is owned by his in-laws.

Friends, however, warned him the costly degree would only gain him low-paying work in Nashville.

Around that time, a singing family from Lancaster hired Conrad for a session as lead guitar. They were connected to Buddy Cannon, a songwriter and producer well known for his work with artists like Willie Nelson and Kenny Chesney. Conrad messaged Buddy, and they got together for breakfast.

“He was my first contact in Nashville who took me seriously,” Conrad recalls.

Conrad spent 2018 through 2020 in Nashville. Beth worked as a nurse at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, while he worked nights as a body removal attendant for a funeral home. He wanted his days free to meet with people in the music industry. The job had to be temporary, Conrad says, because mortuary transporters, like first responders, have to compartmentalize events as a way to cope.

“I didn’t want to do that,” Conrad recalls. “As a songwriter, I wanted to feel my feelings.”

## A prayer is answered

His time in Nashville taught him a lot about the business side of music, and not all of it good. He warns aspiring artists to beware of unscrupulous managers and to learn about contracts. He also warns artists against becoming

disillusioned or allowing the business to make them miserable.

“Success in the music industry is a sliding scale,” he says. “You have to do it for you. My family is really important to me. You have to decide what your priorities are and stick to them. No way could I leave my wife at home with three young children.”

Conrad purchased the old McCoysville church in November 2022. He found out the building was for sale through a friend.

“I didn’t even know there was a church in McCoysville,” he recalls. “I’ve always had a dream of owning a church. I like old buildings.”

Real estate agents were only giving tours of the building to those with funds. Conrad made a low offer and didn’t get a response. After learning his offer had not been relayed, he figured they couldn’t stop him from going to church. He attended a Sunday morning service and told the congregants about his idea to keep the building filled with music.

“They had church on the 20th,” he recalls. “The closing was on the 21st, and I was holding sessions on the 22nd. It’s a very live room. I can track a whole band in here. The drums are upstairs.”

Conrad describes his style as honest music that is profound to people for their own reasons.

“The best songs connect with a

10-year-old kid the same way they do with [theoretical physicist] Stephen Hawking,” Conrad says. “I’m a lyric guy. It has to have a good melody. A 50-cent performance on a \$10,000 microphone doesn’t matter.”

## A twist of fate

Conrad’s work has enabled musicians from the Mennonite and Amish faiths, which traditionally limit musical experience, to try their hand at recording. He recently helped Amish duo Ben and Rose record the old country music standard, “If Teardrops Were Pennies.” Conrad made a video of the song for the pair’s YouTube channel. He used a drone and edited footage in iMovie.

“I have a lot of clients who just put single after single out and do streaming,” he explains. “Some bands will come and camp in the parking lot.”

Conrad says the community has been extremely supportive of his renovations to the church building. As a history buff who volunteers with the McCulloch’s Mills Memorial and Historical Association he muses that perhaps he was fated to be here: “Lightning struck this bell tower the summer I was born.”

Conrad has released several albums. His catalog and a listing of upcoming concerts is available at [conradfishermusic.com/shop](http://conradfishermusic.com/shop). 📍

# Metal Poles Debuting on Co-op System

**DOUG ROLES,** VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBER SERVICES

**VALLEY RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE (REC)** is continuing to add ductile iron utility poles to its distribution system. Over the past few years, the co-op's line crews have been getting more familiar with the metal poles as operations personnel determine where and how to best use them.

These poles are still relatively new for utilities, having been invented in the mid-1990s. Ductile iron is a type of cast iron that has been used to make pipes since the 1950s. Utilities are increasingly making use of the poles because of the advantages.

"We're slowly introducing them to the system," Valley REC Vice President of Operations Todd Ross

## FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

*Continued from page 14A*

year. Further, Allegheny continues to find ways to reduce costs and maintain stability. It recently secured millions in federal grant funding to boost its supply of affordable, carbon-free energy and add to its nuclear resources. That funding will help stabilize overall energy costs for consumers.

At Valley REC, rising costs are never taken lightly, and rate increases are only considered as a last resort. Our board of directors is made up of cooperative members just like you, so they understand the impact that rate changes have on local families and the rural communities they serve. That's why we will continue to work with partners, like Allegheny, to keep the safe delivery of electricity as affordable as possible.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. I hope you are enjoying your summer and thank you for being a part of Valley REC. God bless. 🙏

**RICH BAUER**  
PRESIDENT & CEO

says. "Like anything else, there's going to be a learning curve. We're using them on three-phase lines and special applications."

## A matter of longevity

The poles are similar in cost to wooden poles and have a 70-year life span. Utilities are finding that new wooden poles from fast-growing trees don't have the density of older wooden poles and are more prone to deterioration.

"We're not getting the longevity out of wooden poles that we used to," Todd explains.

Members may have to look twice to spot one of the new poles. They are a dark, reddish-brown. Up close, they have a crosshatch texture.

"You really can't tell the difference," says Eric Henchey, Valley REC coordination engineer. "From a distance, they look like the older, creosote poles. We have just a handful so far. We started out by using them for our regulator platforms. Now, we are starting to use them for more hard-to-reach locations."

Valley REC's first metal poles are at the Little Valley substation and a regulator bank near Route 26 in Todd and Lincoln townships, Huntingdon County. Those at the Little Valley substation were installed in 2024. The co-op placed its first ductile iron poles in 2021 and 2022.

Some utilities in the Southeast have been placing the metal poles every fifth span to strengthen their systems, Eric says. Electric utilities also like the poles because they're not affected by animal damage. And, unlike wooden poles, they don't require a grounding wire.

"They're not affected by bugs and rot and woodpeckers," Eric notes. "There's no chemical in them."

"The downside is you can't climb them," Todd says, "so they are placed where crews can reach them using a bucket truck or track machine."



**NEW POLES:** Above – Three ductile iron poles are located at Valley Rural Electric Cooperative's (REC) Little Valley substation. Below – Valley REC Coordination Engineer Eric Henchey inspects regulator controls mounted to one of the ductile iron poles. The poles have a 70-year life span.



Ductile iron is fairly easy to drill with a regular drill and hardened bit. Fiberglass crossarms can be mounted to the poles, and attachments, such as telecommunications line, can be affixed with a metal strap. The poles can be bought in sections and assembled on-site or bought in one piece.

Eric says some co-ops are also using fiberglass poles. One drawback to fiberglass, Eric notes, is lineworkers must be cautious not to chip the exterior coating, which can open the pole to deterioration.

Valley REC placed several fiberglass poles on its system near the Bonney Forge plant outside of Mount Union in 2015. The wooden poles there were deteriorating, and woodpeckers had caused substantial damage to the pole tops. The co-op also has fiberglass poles where its line crosses the Raystown Branch of the Juniata River near Saxton, Bedford County. 🙏