

**Valley
Rural Electric
Cooperative, Inc.**

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric
cooperatives serving
Pennsylvania and
New Jersey

Valley Rural Electric
Cooperative, Inc.
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FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

Finding the value of electricity



by **Wayne Miller**
President & CEO

IN THIS DAY and age, cell phones and personal digital devices are a part of our culture. Almost everyone, it seems, is connected on the go — whether they're making phone calls, text messaging or checking email. Such communication freedom is a luxury we pay for, generally without grumbling.

So why is it that when it comes to electricity — a

necessity in our modern world — many of us complain when the electric bill comes every month? We've come to expect electricity to be there at the flip of a switch, and when it's not, we get angry or frustrated.

Hey, I'm no different; I expect the lights to come on every time, too. And as the president and CEO of Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, I have a special responsibility to make sure your electric service is safe, reliable and affordable. But I also believe that, when compared to other commodities, electricity remains a great value.

For example, over the past 10 years, gasoline has shot up 10.9 percent on average every single year, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. A loaf of white bread has increased 4.2 percent annually, and a dozen eggs 6.5 percent per year.

In comparison, electricity for Valley REC consumers has increased just 1.6 percent annually over the past decade. And when you consider how reliable electricity is, the value goes up even more.

Valley members, on average, experience

a total of 2.9 hours of service interruptions annually. So out of the 8,760 hours per year that power is available to you, less than three of those hours are interrupted. This is not bad, considering electricity is a 24-hour-a-day commodity and we serve some rugged, rural terrain that makes it challenging to deliver power to you and to keep trees and animals from damaging our equipment. Of course, we're working hard to reduce even those brief interruptions, increase our service reliability and control costs through innovative technology.

About those cell phones I mentioned earlier — nearly a third of all U.S. households have at least four electronic devices, such as cell phones, plugged in and using electricity to re-charge, according to the Residential Energy Consumption Survey done by the U.S. Energy Information Administration. In the past 30 years, the amount of residential electricity used by appliances and electronics has increased from 17 percent to 31 percent. More homes than ever use large appliances and central air conditioning. Plus digital video recorders (DVRs), computers and multiple televisions in the home have become commonplace.

Clearly, our appetite for electricity shows no signs of slowing down. So the next time you flip a switch, use your toaster or run your washing machine, remember the value electricity holds. And know that we here at Valley Rural Electric Co-op are looking out for you by working to keep electric bills affordable and controlling costs through innovation. 

Garden Treasures

Gift shop, garden center let
co-op couple live
out country dreams

BY SUSAN R. PENNING
Director of Member Services

**"WE WERE READY TO GET
BACK TO THE COUNTRY ..."**

That's what prompted Kathy Phoenix and her husband, Wes, to take a leap of faith and purchase a 46-acre farm on co-op lines near McVeytown, Mifflin County.

"We bought our farm at an auction in 1992," Kathy recalls, "which was a very nerve-racking way to buy property. The bidding was fast and furious, but in the end we had the last bid and we began a new chapter in our lives. At the time of the auction we were living in Lewistown and were owners of the Roller's Roost, a roller staking rink. But (Wes and I) both grew up on a farm, our son had left for college and we were ready ..."

After purchasing the farm, Wes realized his dream of raising beef cattle. Over the years, he built up a herd of polled Herefords and Red Angus. (He now sells bulls, heifers and cows mainly for breeding.)

As Wes was hard at work on the farm with the cattle, Kathy was getting a bit stir-crazy.

"Our farm is a half mile off of Ferguson Valley Road, and after being snowed in for weeks at a time each winter, I was ready for a hobby," she chuckles.

Kathy always had an interest in flowers and landscaping, so she began painting flower pots. Together with her mother and husband, Kathy created a hearty display of pots and planter boxes to sell at the annual Country Memories Day in McVeytown. They also sold their wares at Christmas in the Park in Reedsville.

**NOT YOUR EVERYDAY GARDEN
CENTER:** Garden Treasures Gift
Shop near McVeytown shows off its
owners' creative bent.



ABOVE: Kathy Phoenix plants a vintage pail with flowers. She enjoys scouring flea markets and auctions for unique items that can serve as planters.

RIGHT: Kathy and Wes Phoenix now manage two large greenhouses where they grow their own flowers. They offer the widest variety in the spring and fall.



“(After awhile) we decided that packing, setting up and packing again was not for us, so in the fall of 1997 we started building a gift shop that we would call Garden Treasures. We would make the containers and buy flowers from other greenhouses to fill the planters. We opened in May of 1998. Two years later we put up a small greenhouse to store the plants I was buying,” Kathy says.

The following year, the couple decided to try their hand at growing their own plants. It blossomed — literally — into two more large greenhouses on the property.

Garden Treasures, now a packed gift shop and small garden center, offers visiting shoppers a wide selection of potted

flowers, plants and hanging baskets. Inside the shop, guests can browse through home décor and seasonal gifts as well as women’s jewelry, handbags and accessories. There are candles, towels, rugs, garden flags and ornaments, silk flowers and more. Plus a separate building houses one of the largest selections of wrought iron in the area.

But the pièce de résistance is definitely the shop’s unique displays of fresh flowers and containers.

“We scour flea markets and auctions for old chairs, tins, barrels and anything we think could hold flowers,” Kathy says. “We also make an array of planters from old wood. You never know what

you will find when you stop by as everything is one of a kind and changes weekly. We also do custom planting. You can drop off your planters and we will fill them for you.”

Garden Treasures is open (now through July 4) Wednesdays through Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The shop closes from July 4 until Labor Day but reopens again from Labor Day through Christmas Eve, featuring fall plants and decor and Christmas items during that season. The shop is located at 6894 Ferguson Valley Road. For more information, call 717/899-7172. For cattle information, call Wes at 899-7787. 🌱

COUNTRY CHARM: Visitors at Garden Treasures can shop for unique gifts and home decor while getting a true taste of the country life. The farm features cattle, chickens, natural wildlife, a pond, stream and more. Bring a picnic lunch and enjoy the scenery.



Assistance available through Members Helping Members

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE for Valley REC members who are unable to pay their utility bills is available through a consumer-funded cooperative program called Members Helping Members. Through Members Helping Members, thousands of dollars have been generously donated over the years by Valley consumers who desire to help their friends and neighbors who are experiencing financial hardship. And donations continue to be gratefully accepted.

Adequate funding for this program is available for disbursement, so the co-op is encouraging applications from consumers who have fallen on tough times. Such financial difficulty could arise from a family crisis, including death, hospitalization, divorce, loss of employment and so on.

To receive assistance through the Members Helping Members program, an

application form must be completed and returned to the cooperative's headquarters in Huntingdon. Applications will be kept on file for one year. Consumers may reapply annually; however, first-time applicants will be given preference over those who have received funds in prior years. All applications will be kept confidential.

There are no income restrictions for applicants to the Members Helping Members program. Dollars will be allocated based on the amount of funding available. Grant levels will be calculated according to electric use, and will be credited to an account only once per year.

An account does not have to be in arrears to qualify. However, if the account is in arrears, the consumer receiving funds through Members Helping Members must sign a payment arrangement form and agree to pay the entire balance

plus the current bill within six months.

If you are a full-time resident on co-op lines and believe that your situation meets the criteria for assistance through Members Helping Members, please take advantage of this worthwhile program. If you know of a household served by Valley that could benefit from the Members Helping Members program, you may apply on their behalf. And if you are interested in helping your fellow co-op consumers who are less fortunate by participating in Members Helping Members, a choice of several billing options make donating easy.

For more information or an application or donation form, contact the co-op's billing department at 814/643-2650 or toll-free 800/432-0680. Or download an application at www.valleyrec.com. Follow the Programs & Services link to Members Helping Members. ☀

Filling Up on VALUE

Electricity continues to be a bargain, especially when compared to other consumer goods. Imagine if your electric bill fluctuated as much as prices at the pump. On average, over the past decade gas prices have risen almost 11 percent annually, while electricity prices rose less than 4 percent.

Average annual price increase between 2000-2010:

- Unleaded Gasoline, 1 gallon: 10.9%
- Electricity, 500 kWh: 3.7%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Mainstream Graphics

Revenue in Review

Because of higher population densities (more consumers served per mile of line), municipal electric systems and investor-owned utilities receive more revenue per mile of line than electric cooperatives.

Consumers served/revenue per mile of line for different utilities:

Utility Type	Consumers Served	Revenue per Mile of Line
Municipal Electric Systems	47	\$86,302
Investor-Owned Utilities	35	\$62,665
Member-Owned Electric Distribution Cooperatives	7	\$10,565

Source: National Rural Electric Cooperative Association