

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

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FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

Giving thanks



by Rich Bauer
President & CEO

NOVEMBER IS the month we celebrate the many things in life we are thankful for. The end of the month is highlighted by Thanksgiving Day — a day where most of us eat too much and fall asleep in front of the TV watching football — but the true meaning of Thanksgiving is to give thanks for the bounty of the harvest.

There are many things I am personally thankful for this time of year, and I would like to share some of them with you. Thanksgiving is my favorite time of the year. I am thankful that families can gather together to enjoy a meal and catch up with one another. Too many times, life becomes so hectic that we forget to stop and smell the roses. Thanksgiving is a time that, for most people, forces you to put aside all the extra stuff you have to do and sit down with family or friends and enjoy the company.


I am also extremely thankful for the area where we live. The changing of the seasons is something that I would never want to give up, even though I do not appreciate winter as much as I used to. Along with the arrival of fall comes my favorite time of the year — hunting season. Though I know not all people hunt or enjoy hunting, it is my time in the woods that makes it so special. When I was younger, I judged my hunting season on whether or not I bagged the game I was after, but now, as more and more years slip by, it has changed to just being in the woods and appreciating the surroundings.

I am so thankful we live in an area with ample woods, beautiful scenery and an abundance of animals to see. Being in the woods takes away the hustle and bustle of everyday life and it

gives me the quiet time to think and reflect. I often say to my son that hunting is my “Calgon moment.” He doesn’t understand this, but for those of you who remember the commercial, “Calgon, take me away,” it fits for me.

I am also extremely thankful for Valley Rural Electric and all the cooperatives around the world. Seventy-five years ago this month, Valley REC energized its first members, and it continues to grow stronger every year. Those individuals who had the vision and determination to step outside of the box started a movement to create a cooperative that would better not only their lives, but the lives of their friends and neighbors. I can assure you it wasn’t easy or cheap, but their determination to bring electricity to their house or farm and to make a better life for their family and future generations outweighed the initial obstacles. It is hard to believe that 75 years ago, there was no electricity in the vast majority of our rural area. Today, we take it for granted that when we flip the switch, the lights will come on. I wish I could go back in time and see a household that, for the first time, flipped a switch and saw lights.

I am thankful for many things, especially my family, friends and my cooperative family. I hear too often people saying they hate their job or hate going to work. I feel for them because I really enjoy my job and look forward to seeing everyone each day. It truly is a family at Valley REC, and for that, I am extremely thankful.

I want to wish everyone a happy Thanksgiving and wish all the hunters success this season in the woods. Please take the time to stop and smell the roses and reflect on all those things you are thankful for in your life. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to call, email or stop in anytime. Take care and God Bless. 

Decoy business takes flight

BY DOUG ROLES
Director of Member Services

A LOCAL waterfowl guide's idea for an innovative goose decoy flies in the face of a trend toward foreign-made hunting products. The Pennsylvania-made "bird" adds realism to decoy spreads with less weight and easier storage for hunters.

Valley REC member Chuck Elder of James Creek, Huntingdon County, has operated James Creek Outfitters (a waterfowl hunting guide service) for 19 years. Bouts of frustration with bulky, cheaply made decoys caused him to start The Anser Decoy Co. to offer hunters something new in wind sock decoys.

"We're the only ones to design a wind sock that will ride sideways in the wind," Chuck says. "You can get it set at different balance points. You can get different angles out of one product."

Until now, wind socks have all pointed in the same direction — flume (the port that fills the sock with air) facing into the wind. And hunters have had to add full-bodied and shell decoys to get a natural looking decoy spread. That's meant lugging heavy sacks of multiple kinds of decoys.

Now, Anser's SideKick Decoy® combines a side opening O-ring and a multi-positional plastic support to create a wind sock decoy that pulls a right face to the rest of the flock. The side support and side facing O-ring cause the wind sock to work much the same as a boat sail. The SideKick Decoys® come in right and left side variations, so the decoys can face in different directions, like birds in real flocks. Anser has a patent pending on the concept.

In his years of guiding, Chuck has used various models of decoys. He laments that 95 percent of them are made in China and

lack qualities serious hunters want. He says the industry's long-promised improvements have never materialized.

"They're junk," Chuck says. "The improvements never came, so I decided I'm going to do it myself."

In 2011, Chuck began working on prototypes. He also realized he wanted a partner in the venture and knew just the man. Enter his longtime friend Jim Orr of Johnstown. The two former Army officers are both retired from the Pennsylvania Army National Guard and share an entrepreneurial bent.

"We actually met while serving together on battalion staff," Chuck recalls. "I know the hunting industry and Jim's the numbers guy. He brings an MBA to the table. When it comes to margins and overhead, he's a wizard."

"Having hunted with Chuck for nearly two decades, and spent plenty of time talking with him about the industry, when he came to me with his thoughts, I just did the research," Jim says. "I found an immediate need in a micro-niche of the outdoor industry that would allow

the company to start up and subsequently expand from there."

"We decided we were going to be the weird guys and have our product made in the USA," Chuck adds.

Anser formed in July 2013. Jim wrote the numbers portion of the business plan, while Chuck put together the product information. The two then tapped into a local agency for help.

"We could never have gotten this off the ground without HCBI (Huntingdon County Business and Industry)," says Chuck. In particular, he credits HCBI Executive Director Amy Wise.

"Anser Decoy is the ideal kind of project for HCBI," Amy says. "We have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know the owners of this company. Chuck and Jim sought our assistance early in the project, which enabled us to assist them with many aspects including business plan development, product development, supply chain/vendor selection, and most importantly, financing. As the business continues to grow and develop, we remain in contact with the ownership to look for new ways that we can help them grow."

Amy says the hunting industry is a vital part of economic development in Huntingdon County, where there have been a number of hunting-related businesses open in recent years. Hunters today have a wider range of accoutrements to choose from than ever before.

"As we have taken our next steps into the Canada goose decoys and ancillary products, we are excited to grow during the upcoming sales season, from now through



Made-in-PA Goose

- ▶ Concept originates in James Creek
 - ▶ Sewing, Shirleysburg
 - ▶ Screen printing, Schaefferstown
 - ▶ Decoy head manufacture, Erie
 - ▶ Molded plastic frame, New Oxford
- O-rings are manufactured in Ohio and shipped in-state

REALISTIC DECOY: Anser's SideKick Decoy,® unlike other wind socks, can be placed perpendicular to the wind and is adjustable.

March or April,” Jim says. “Depending on how things go, we are already planning the next expansion. It may never be ‘Duck Dynasty,’ but we will settle for ‘Chuck Dynasty.’ My friend has worked his butt off on this and deserves the credit for everything that happens.”

Chuck worked in health care for 27 years. He started James Creek Outfitters as a one-man show, while working full time and attending military trainings.

“I was a one-man band; I was pretty busy,” he says.

He now devotes his working hours to Anser and James Creek Outfitters (JCO). JCO offers hunts in Pennsylvania and New York using 13 guides. The business ventures carry on a hunting tradition Chuck was introduced to at age 12 when his father took him duck hunting on the river banks near Saxton, Bedford County.

Chuck and Jim pride themselves on offering a quality product that will last for many years. They espouse value and attention to detail over price, down to the paint used in the decoy heads.

“Our closest competitors have heads that will yellow from the sun in two to three years,” Chuck says. “These have a UV inhibitor that will take 30,000 hours of sunlight.”

Hunters who buy the Anser product will appreciate the light (17 percent lighter than comparable models), tough construction and user-friendly features. For starters, existing wind sock decoys use a flat banding (think packaging straps) for the front ring that does not spring back into shape once it is crushed and kinked.

“One of the first things I designed in my decoy was a stay-open collar,” Chuck says.

Chuck did several experiments clipping different types of hose together to see what materials would not kink. Eventually a tubing was selected that retains its springiness in a wide range of temperatures, since decoys can be stored in hot garages and vehicles, then used in very cold weather.

The ring comes from a supplier in Ohio. Other than that, the decoy is manufactured using Pennsylvania businesses.

“It’s not just USA-made; it’s Pennsylvania-made,” Chuck says.

The screen printing is done in Schaeferstown, Lebanon County, while an Erie business molds the plastic heads, which a



PHOTOS BY DOUG ROLES

Above: Chuck Elder shows off the new line of Canada Goose decoys in a Huntingdon County cornfield.

Bottom: JDM owner Ray Yetter inspects a shipment from the screen printer. Ray says it took several weeks to figure out the sewing aspect of Anser’s product but he raves about the Tyvek body saying, “This stuff takes a beating and it’s hard to tear.”

grown man can stand on without crushing.

Sewing is done in Shirleysburg, Huntingdon County, by JDM Manufacturing. The painting of the heads is done in Johnstown.

“It took 36 calls to find a screen printer for the decoys,” Chuck recalls. “Our inks are totally flat; real geese don’t reflect sunlight.”

Anser decoys use a flexible fiberglass stake. The tan color blends well with corn stalks. Decoys are available in adult and juvenile snow, blue and Canada goose.

The head for the Canada goose decoy is covered in a black flocking that adds texture to the model. Scratching at some of the material to demonstrate its durability, Chuck says, “Your fingernail will wear off before the flocking does.”

The Anser has a universal back-support mechanism that works with all Anser models. Chuck says the plastic manufacturer he works with hailed the support mold as one of the most detailed he has seen.

Anser’s plastic molding work is done in New Oxford, Adams County, by Covington Plastic Molding. Chuck tells a story about the initial run of plastic frames not being designed to be rigid enough for the decoy to pivot on correctly. He says he met



with Covington leaders and explained his predicament and the company was able to remanufacture those parts, adding a piece of bracing. The move saved time and most likely the loss of those 5,000 pieces had the manufacturer been an off-shore company.


The main support of the decoy, the one that forms the bird’s back, is collapsible for better storage. Through ingenious design, the plastic support pivots on the stake, flattening the decoy in one direction. Chuck had given a lot of thought to how to add this feature to his decoy and came up with the design just before drifting off to sleep, in that period of restfulness that those in the health field, Chuck says, call “hyper-lucidity.”

“I sat up in bed and yelled, ‘I got it,’” Chuck says, remembering that he woke his wife, Sarah, who was not as thrilled as he at the late-night epiphany.

Another particularly creative moment in the Anser journey was when Chuck sat down at the kitchen table with some clay to sculpt the two versions of the decoy head. What he made became the model for the mold in use today, though he had never before sculpted.

Chuck is excited that Anser is entering its first full season with its whole product line available. He and Jim see keeping their production in the U.S. as doing their part to preserve the American way of life. Jim and Chuck believe Anser Decoys help pass on hunting to future generations.

“You can hand these decoys down to your grandkids,” he says.

Anser offers a military and emergency services discount. Visit Anser Decoy online at www.theanserdecoy.com and James Creek Outfitters at www.raystown.net. 

Valley retiree enjoys family time

BY DOUG ROLES

Director of Member Services

A FORMER Valley REC employee who did a number of jobs for the co-op is enjoying a retirement filled with family, crafts and a really big dog. Glenda Strong of Oneida Township, Huntingdon County, retired in March after performing a variety of secretarial and safety jobs for the co-op.

Glenda is a 1972 graduate of Southern Huntingdon County High School and a 1982 graduate of Empire Beauty School, Lewistown.

Glenda started with Valley REC in 1999 as a temporary staffer through Manpower. She was exploring re-entering the work force after an extended period away from full-time work.

After temporary work through Manpower, she was employed in a physician's office until the physician announced plans to retire. That's when she was contacted by a friend who told her the co-op had a full-time opening.

"I was hired July 10, 2000," Glenda recalls.

She joined Valley REC as an assistant to the co-op's executive secretary. She answered the phone, prepared correspondence and helped with planning events, such as the co-op's annual meeting, Christmas party, and the employee picnic.

"I did all the accident reports and worker's compensation reports, too," she says, adding that those duties followed her throughout several positions.

In 2002, the co-op began to pursue safety accreditation through National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). Glenda worked with the operations manager to make that happen. One of the key tasks was to compile the co-op's emergency response plan. Glenda remembers that time at Valley as "major typing." The effort to garner the accreditation required establishing a safety committee, which added the job of safety committee secretary to Glenda's list of responsibilities.

She also helped staff the Member Services department for a period of time.



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

RETIRED LIFE: Glenda and Hank Strong enjoy time together with one of their biggest best friends, their Irish wolfhound, Jack Brown. Glenda retired from Valley REC in March.

There she assisted with the publication of *Valley News*, the co-op's bi-monthly member newsletter.

"I was all over the place with a variety of increasing responsibilities," Glenda says of her years at Valley REC.

She ultimately landed in the Consumer Services department for her final months with the co-op. There she learned consumer service functions such as processing electronic payments. She also ensured that rights-of-way paperwork was filed with courthouse offices.

Glenda marked her last day with Valley REC March 6, 2014. Though she keeps in touch with some of her VREC friends, she is enjoying making her own schedule.

Glenda's husband, Hank, is also

retired. He worked in finance, retiring as an investment manager and vice president with M&T Bank.

The Strongs' retirement isn't all about sitting back at home. Hank serves as treasurer for Oneida Township and is active as a National Rifle Association-certified firearms instructor. The couple have been married for 10 years and also enjoy spending time with the other resident of their home, their dog, Jack Brown, an Irish wolfhound, the breed known as "gentle giants."

Glenda and Hank also enjoy spending time with their family. Hank's two daughters and Glenda's daughter are in a similar age group. The family is rounded out with three grandchildren. The co-op staff and board wish her a happy and healthy retirement. 🌟