

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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Guest Column



Electricity transforms lives

By Liza Parks, *Intern*

HI, FOLKS. My name is Liza Parks and I am a senior at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, as well as a part-time intern at Valley Rural Electric Cooperative. Recently, I was given the opportunity to assist the co-op in digitizing member information by scanning files into the computer system. My fellow student interns and I worked together in an effort to “clean house” in the co-op’s life-size filing cabinets that were filled to the brim with decades-old paperwork.

Employees need to be able to access member information quickly and efficiently, which is why the efforts of the scanners are appreciated. Through this process and my day-to-day mingling with the Valley REC team, I became educated on the services that the co-op provides and what the employees stand for. The co-op is an incredibly family-oriented organization, truly living up to the title of being a cooperative. This word means much more to me than ever before.


Now that you know who I am, I want to give my personal testimony of how much Valley REC has impacted my own family. I am a central Pennsylvania native, raised on Parks Fruit Orchard in Juniata Township, Huntingdon County. Juniata Township is one of 70 municipalities that has enjoyed electricity because of Valley Rural in the past 78 years of expanding services. My grandmother, Donna (Strait) Parks, told me that Valley Rural brought power to her family farm in the late 1950s, and it completely transformed her family’s lifestyle.

Before Valley Rural strung lines to the farmhouse, her family relied solely on oil lamps. Private power companies did

not want to bother with the rural farms and homes because they were so scattered across the countryside — and because these families were not considered to have potential as profitable customers. My grandmother remembers the time the ordinary folks — farmers, mechanics, laborers and housewives — decided they were not willing to be left in the dark as the rest of society grew, so they established the co-op.

She described her gratitude for those who participated in achieving a new quality of life for rural families everywhere. This year — 2016 — marks the 57th year that my family has enjoyed the benefits of being a member of the co-op. Because of Valley REC’s services, my grandparents were able to improve their country lifestyle, maintain it and are now able to pass it down to their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

After learning how much of a role Valley Rural has played in my roots, I recognize how much I take electricity for granted. It is a necessity in everyday life, which just goes to show how important the company’s services are. I feel fortunate to have worked with a team of folks who care about the importance and affordability of providing this basic need to their members. I had the opportunity to read over a personal letter from a member of the co-op, Marjorie Flynn, regarding the annual capital credits refund. She exclaimed, “Every year, I’ve gotten this delicious shock over an unexpected gift! Large or small, doesn’t matter, somebody cared!”

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative’s motives always have and always will be driven by family and cooperation. 

Community enjoys new fitness center thanks to ...

By Doug Roles

Manager of Member Services

“FROM a business perspective, this is a terrible decision,” says Bill Capouillez as he looks around the conference room at the heart of a sprawling new recreation facility in Mifflin County.

“No one would dump millions of dollars into a fitness center in a rural area,” says the Valley REC member who has a love of youth sports, the outdoors, people and life in general.

“No one would do that,” he says.

Yet Bill, his wife, Tracy, and the board members of their McVeytown Local Mission Service Foundation are busy growing the organization’s newest ministry, a fitness center five miles east of McVeytown. The foundation opened Body & Soul Community Center in November, after nearly a year of renovating the former Strodes Mills Middle School.

The center boasts the most square footage of any gym in the region and features weight rooms, a basketball court and a golf simulator. There’s a lot for members to do. But those involved with the foundation see the center as more than a place to bench press 500 pounds or put miles on a treadmill. They hope the center will become part of the fabric of the community.

The center’s story follows a winding path. Tracy and Bill moved to the McVeytown area (and onto Valley REC lines) 21 years ago from Blair County (Tracy is from Tyrone and Bill is from Bellwood). As they learned their way around their new community, they saw a need for youth activities.

“There was a lot of need in the community for mission work,” Bill says. “We saw that a lot of the youth didn’t have a place to go, not where they could be productive. The youth needed a place to go, to congregate in a positive way. There were no football fields or soccer fields.”

Tracy worked in business management in State College and Bill worked in Harrisburg for the Pennsylvania Game Commission, eventually retiring as director of



FUN AND FITNESS: Bill Capouillez and his son, Brock, put up a volleyball net in the gymnasium of Body & Soul Community Center in Mifflin County. A foundation started by Bill and his wife, Tracy, turned the former Strodes Mills Middle School into the largest fitness center in the area.

the agency’s Bureau of Wildlife Management. As they worked their day jobs, they served as deacons in their church and were active in youth sports. Bill, a licensed geologist, had also started a consulting business, setting up natural gas leases for property owners in northern tier counties. As he began the venture, he vowed that if it were successful, he would use his gains toward ministry.

“I promised God,” Bill says.

And then the Marcellus Shale play took off. Bill says he “hit the bubble perfectly.”

“I caught that wave,” he says. “That’s what made the foundation.”

The couple established their non-profit organization in 2010 to foster Christian outreach and youth athletics. The organization has been able to support a new youth team within the Juniata Valley Football League. The kids picked the name McVeytown Knights and the coaches adopted an approach of involving all the players, particularly those who had challenges that would keep them from competing at the high school level and

beyond. As the sports seasons passed and work on the soccer and football fields progressed (adjacent the existing McVeytown playground baseball fields), the foundation was looking at its next step.

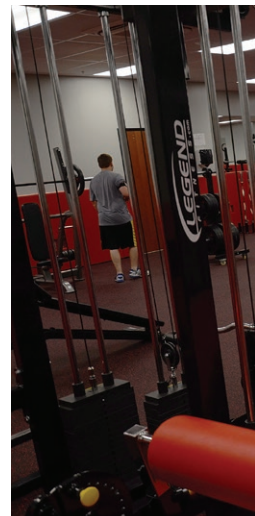
“We wanted to build a community center,” Bill recalls.

The foundation held a public outreach meeting in the McVeytown fire hall to ask residents what they would like to see in a facility. A pool and fitness equipment were some of the top responses.

Originally the plan was to build the community center on the same acreage as the new sports fields along Route 22/522. But a moratorium on new sewage connections and an extensive state permitting process caused delays. Ultimately, the foundation would spend \$60,000 on architectural design work for a building that never came to fruition.

“I was extremely frustrated,” Bill recalls.

Then something unexpected happened. Bill saw a small sign along the highway in Strodes Mills, a notice that the Mifflin County School District



would be auctioning off the vacant middle school there.

"This happened about three days before the cutoff for bids," he says. "It was horrid, how bad the building was."

But the structure had potential. Bill went ahead with the capital outlay — the purchase of the building and the renovation work — in the hopes that the rest would all work out.

"It was far bigger than what Tracy and I would be able to build," he notes. "It also had a gymnasium, not to mention an existing sewer/water system."

The foundation board did not want to compete with other area fitness centers. For example, the YMCA in Lewistown has a pool, so Body & Soul did not pursue that amenity. Neither did they install tanning beds or market the center as a 24/7 gym.

The board wanted the center to have



GETTING FIT: Andrea Haubrick, a Valley REC member from Oliver Township, decided to embark on a fitness program after attending the center's grand opening in November.

a special feel, and the members believe they're reaching that goal.

"The Body and Soul Community Center offers an exciting opportunity for families and individuals," says Michele Morrison, foundation secretary. "The facility provides a comfortable atmosphere for physical fitness, recreational programs, meetings and events. I am excited that we have a place that will facilitate a community atmosphere in our neighborhood."

Michele, a Valley REC member for

18 years, points out that the foundation's board members are all parents who know the importance of youngsters having safe, productive activities.

"The center was needed in the community for health and fitness," she says.

Body & Soul has about 300 members so far. The center offers Zumba classes and boasts new locker rooms, a cafeteria and commercial kitchen, as well as a suspended batting cage.

A space for cheerleading practice and camps is planned for an undeveloped wing. Bill is also building and decorating an archery range. In high school, he had a strong interest in art and says he was encouraged to pursue an art degree, but opted to pursue the sciences. Now he is getting back to his love of art through designing different areas of the center and decorating with wildlife prints and paintings.

Hearing Bill talk about plans for the center, one gets a sense of things coming full circle. He says there was "a lot of destiny" in the project. Red and black bleachers he found for sale by Clearfield Middle School closely match the foundation colors. And the community center likes to think the large CMS lettering now stands for "community, mission and service."

"There it is. That's us. It's like God put the 'CMS' on there!" Bill exclaims.

The center offers a safe environment where people of all backgrounds and sizes can be active. The free weight area — where beefier members are pushing some heavy weight — was purposely separated from another workout room that houses easier-to-use weight machines for



ABOVE: Cale Matthews of Strodes Mills tries to return the ball to Shannon Kauffman of Lewistown. **BELOW:** McVeytown Local Mission Service Foundation members include: Eric Dunmire, member; Michele Morrison, secretary; Bill Capouillez, president; Tracy Capouillez, treasurer; and Sherry Miller, vice president.

novices. Center staff members encourage everyone to develop a fitness plan.

"So what if you're overweight," Bill says. "We want to empower people to work on their goals. This is more of a family, home environment. You can feel relaxed here."

Andrea Haubrick of Oliver Township, a Valley REC member for 13 years, is one of those center members new to working out. She decided to start a fitness plan when the center opened. Now she's a regular.

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Fitness center

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“I came up on the opening weekend,” she explains. “I’ve wanted a place to work out. I want to get serious about getting fit.”

Andrea says she loves the facility.

“They thought of everything,” she says. “The saunas are awesome.”

Bill, Tracy and the foundation’s board members put in many hours at the center. After all, there are volleyball nets to be put up and taken down, prospective new members who need a tour, and a host of other jobs to be done. Bill says the community center’s goal is to be self-sustaining after getting a start from foundation resources.

Asked why he didn’t take his gains and enjoy an easy retirement, Bill comes back to the promise he made.



MAY WE HELP YOU?: Foundation treasurer Tracy Capouillez, left, and Mandy Renninger, personal trainer and nutrition coach, welcome visitors at the front desk.

Wounded Warrior Hunts

The McVeytown Local Mission Service Foundation supports archery and muzzleloader hunts for wounded warriors and those with physical disabilities or a terminal illness. For more information, go to www.mcveytownfoundation.com and click on the “Fur and Fowl” link.

“We’re all just stewards of something,” he says. “It’s never ours to keep. It’s ours to manage — to manage in a selfless way.”

Body & Soul Community Center is located at 205 Chestnut Ridge Road, McVeytown. The center can be reached by phone at 717-899-2111 or online at www.mcveytownfoundation.com. Discounts are offered for veterans, students, and families, and the gymnasium/kitchen is available for event rental.

Co-op scholarship applications available to traditional and returning adult students

VALLEY Rural Electric Cooperative will award up to 15 \$1,000 scholarships this year to eligible students who qualify. 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 local communities.

Eligibility requirements

The applicant must be:

- ▶ An active Valley REC member or dependent of an active member. (Valley REC directors and employees and their dependents are not eligible.)
- ▶ Attending or planning to attend an accredited post-secondary institution.
- ▶ Enrolled or planning to enroll full time for the 2016-2017 academic year.

Previous Brighter Future scholarship recipients are not eligible.

How to apply

Applications are available at the co-op’s website. Visit www.valleyrec.com and follow the “Programs and Services” link to the “Scholarships” section.

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.
brighter future
 Scholarship Program

There are two versions of the application: one for high school students and one for high school graduates.

Applications are also 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 mailed to Valley Rural Electric Cooperative and postmarked by April 15, 2016.

Scholarship selections will be made in May. Award recipients will be notified by the end of June.

Please direct questions to memberservices@valleyrec.com or call 1-800-432-0680.