

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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From the President & CEO



'Leap yearing' into 2020

By Rich Bauer

IT HAPPENS; every four years, we see that Feb. 29 date pop up on the calendar. It seems that they could have picked a much better month than February to add the additional day. Wouldn't an additional day be nice in, say, July?

All joking aside, the additional day in February seems to make winter last a little longer, but it is nice for the planning process of your cooperative. Though our line crews are still out working during the cold winter days, our busiest time of the year is just around the corner — spring. It seems construction on most new homes, garages and even businesses starts up once winter breaks. It's the same for your cooperative. All those new structures need power, and that takes planning.

January and February are busy months for the folks in Valley's operations department. They work to plan out all the new construction, replacements and upgrades for the entire year during these months. We begin to see which jobs we are going to tackle and what material we will need for the upcoming year. We also plan when to order and purchase that material for the jobs. Throw in the surprise jobs that always pop up, along with the always unpredictable Mother Nature, and we prepare a good base plan for the year. Things always change. It's inevitable, but as they say, you have to roll with the punches and see where you end up.

On the following pages, you will

hear about some of those bigger projects that we have planned for 2020. Two of the most important are the substation upgrades that will be underway soon. The new Path Valley Substation will be replacing our Metal Substation. This project was prompted by the unreliable service that we received from our power supplier. That substation is currently being fed from an older line that travels over a very long distance. When that line goes out, our substation goes out and there isn't much we can do but wait until Penelec fixes their problem. We felt there had to be a better way to serve our area. By building a new substation closer to Fort Loudon, we were able to receive a much more reliable, higher-voltage feed that comes directly from a West Penn Power substation over a much shorter distance. Our members in that area should see a much more reliable, constant feed when this work is completed. We have already cleared the ground and poured the foundations so steel should be up by the spring.

As for the Atkinson Mills Substation, it is one of our oldest structures and the wood beams are starting to show their age. This substation is located on an extremely small piece of ground that we have filled to the max. We purchased property around the existing substation and are going to be able to build our new steel structure substation right next to the existing one, so we won't see any long outages when we need to switch over. Once we energize the new

(continues on page 14d)

Valley Rural Electric to rebuild, replace two substations in 2020

By Doug Roles

Vice President of Member Services

VALLEY Rural Electric Cooperative has planned a number of system improvements for 2020, including the rebuilding of two substations. This year will be one of the busiest in recent memory as the co-op continues to replace aging infrastructure and improve service reliability for co-op members.

Valley REC has been planning and preparing for the substation projects for about two years. The co-op anticipates the first project will be completed in late spring.

“Most of the system improvement work this year focuses on the new Path Valley Substation and then the Atkinson Mills Substation,” says Todd Ross, Valley REC’s vice president of operations.

The Path Valley Substation will be located in Peters Township, Franklin County, in the co-op’s Shade Gap service district. It will replace the Metal Substation along Route 75 in Metal Township.

“The Path Valley Substation will be located about a mile north of Fort Loudon, also on Route 75,” Ross says. “We plan to break ground this month (January). We’ll set the steel this winter.”

The Metal Substation is served by Penelec. However, West Penn Power will be the delivery point provider for the new substation due to the new location.

The new site is closer to its delivery point than the Metal Substation is to the Penelec line. The shorter distance to the power supply lessens the likelihood of a private power company service disruption to the substation, which could cause an outage for hundreds of co-op members until either the private power company repairs its line or Valley REC reroutes power from another substation.

“The main reason we’re doing this is to increase service reliability,” Ross says. “There’s a lot of exposure with the existing delivery point distance.”

The project includes upgrading 27 spans of single-phase (single-line) distribution wire to three-phase. A new line will also be built on the delivery side of the substation to connect to the West Penn delivery point.

The Metal Substation infrastructure will be used as a switching station. Switching stations facilitate the rerouting of electricity.

Around the time the Fort Loudon project is winding down in late spring, construction of a new Atkinson Mills Substation will be ramping up. The substation is located along Route 22/522 in Wayne Township, Mifflin County, in the co-op’s Huntingdon service district.

“It will be at the same location,” Ross says. “It will be all



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

OUT WITH THE OLD: Valley REC’s Metal Substation is being replaced in 2020 with a new facility, the new Path Valley Substation. It will be located about seven miles south of the existing structure along Route 75 in Franklin County.

new steel. The old, wooden substation will be dismantled.”

Last year, Valley REC purchased an acre of ground around the existing facility. The additional acreage will improve access and provide plenty of space for the new substation.

Valley REC’s system includes 22 substations. The Atkinson Mills and Metal substations have been in service for more than 50 years.

In the Martinsburg District, the co-op is planning to purchase ground for the construction of a new Sinking Valley Substation in the future. The existing substation is located near Route 453 in Tyrone Township, Blair County. New construction would update the equipment, improve access and eliminate the existing layout in which the first several spans of the north feeder (the main line out of the substation) traverse a steep ridge.

“It’s also an older sub, built in the 1950s, and it needs to be rebuilt,” Ross says.

Valley REC would like to remind the public that substations contain high-voltage equipment. Unauthorized personnel should never attempt entry into a substation.

Other system improvement work slated for 2020 will

GETTING READY: Valley REC's new Path Valley substation will be located on this lot along Route 75, just north of Fort Loudon, Franklin County. Ayers Line Construction is currently setting poles in preparation for the construction project.

include the final upgrade of the power line along Route 35 in Juniata County. That line is served by the new Reeds Gap Substation, which was energized in October 2016 and replaced the previous facility of the same name.

Crews will also install primary underground service at a development near Martinsburg, and aging wire will be replaced in portions of the Huntingdon District. System-wide, crews will be replacing 92 deteriorating poles identified during recent pole inspections.

Additionally, Valley Rural Electric plans to conduct tree-trimming work along approximately 400 miles of co-op rights-of-way. The vegetation management work is important because it lessens the likelihood of trees causing outages during storms and makes it easier for crews to access lines for maintenance and outage restoration work.

"We greatly appreciate the cooperation of our members who play a large role in helping to keep maintenance costs down," says Kevin Detwiler, Valley REC staff forester. "Members often help us with things such as finding access to the lines, reporting dead trees and allowing the necessary work to be done on their property."

"Vegetation management is critical to reliability because 95% of tree-related outages result from off-corridor trees falling into the established right of way," Detwiler says. "Our program proactively identifies and removes potential hazard trees along our lines, which reduces these types of outages."

Valley REC follows an aggressive right-of-way maintenance schedule that gets the entire system trimmed in a five-year period. As a courtesy, Valley REC and our contractors notify approximately 3,000 property owners each year about the vegetation maintenance work to be performed on their properties. As always, members with tree-trimming questions or concerns are encouraged to contact the co-op. 🌳



PHOTOS BY DOUG ROLES

IN WITH THE NEW: The Atkinson Mills Substation is being replaced by a new substation at the same location. The substation is located along Route 22 in Mifflin County.



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Meet your employees

FEATURED in this column is a recent addition to the Valley REC team, Brandon Shook. He joined Valley Rural Electric Cooperative in August as a journeyman lineman.

Shook is from the Martinsburg area. He went into utility work following his 2007 graduation from Central High School in Blair County.

He got his start with Davis H. Elliott Company, Inc., a Roanoke, Va.-based power line construction company. He spent eight years with Elliott, working in the Baltimore area for some of that time.

“I went straight to it as a groundman and worked my way up,” Shook recalls. “It was a good experience, definitely a lot of training on storm restoration.”

He also worked as a foreman with East Coast Utility, LLC and as a lead lineman with C.W. Wright Construction in State College. He has worked with overhead and underground line building.

“I was in cities; I never left the blacktop really,” Shook recalls. “I like the atmosphere here at Valley and working in the rural areas. The guys are great.”

Shook came to Valley REC with 12 years of line work experience. He was also familiar with rural electric co-ops. His father, Robert Shook, is a crew leader in Valley REC’s Martinsburg District, and his uncle, Scott Shook, is a crew leader with Bedford Rural Electric.

“I was destined to do this work,” he says. “I’ve been around it all my life.”

As a lineworker, Shook’s job is to build and maintain power lines. Like other members of Valley REC’s line crews, he can put in some long days when necessary to restore service



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

NEW CREW: Brandon Shook is the newest member of the Huntingdon District’s line crew. A journeyman lineman, he joined the Valley REC team in August after working for more than a decade throughout Pennsylvania and Maryland in power line construction.

during outages.

In his spare time, he enjoys hunting and fishing. He also enjoys riding dirt bikes, particularly because one of his riding buddies is his 5-year-old daughter, Colbie Lynn Shook.

“She has a brand-new Honda,” Shook says. “She’s fearless.”

Shook lives near James Creek, Huntingdon County, and plans to build a home in the area. Valley REC’s line crews and staff are glad to have him on board. He’s one of the people you can count on. 🌞

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From the President & CEO

(continued from page 14a)

substation, we can then dismantle the old one without any outages.

Those two new substations will provide upgraded, reliable power to our members in those areas, and it is desperately needed. Besides those large projects, we have a full plate of upgrades and replacements for what is turning into a very busy 2020.

With all these projects that we have planned for 2020, I guess I am thankful for that additional day in February to help get the work done. As always, please feel free to contact me with any questions, comments or concerns. It will be a busy year, but with the help from all of our members, we will continue to provide you with the best possible service at the lowest possible cost. Thank you, and God Bless. 🌞