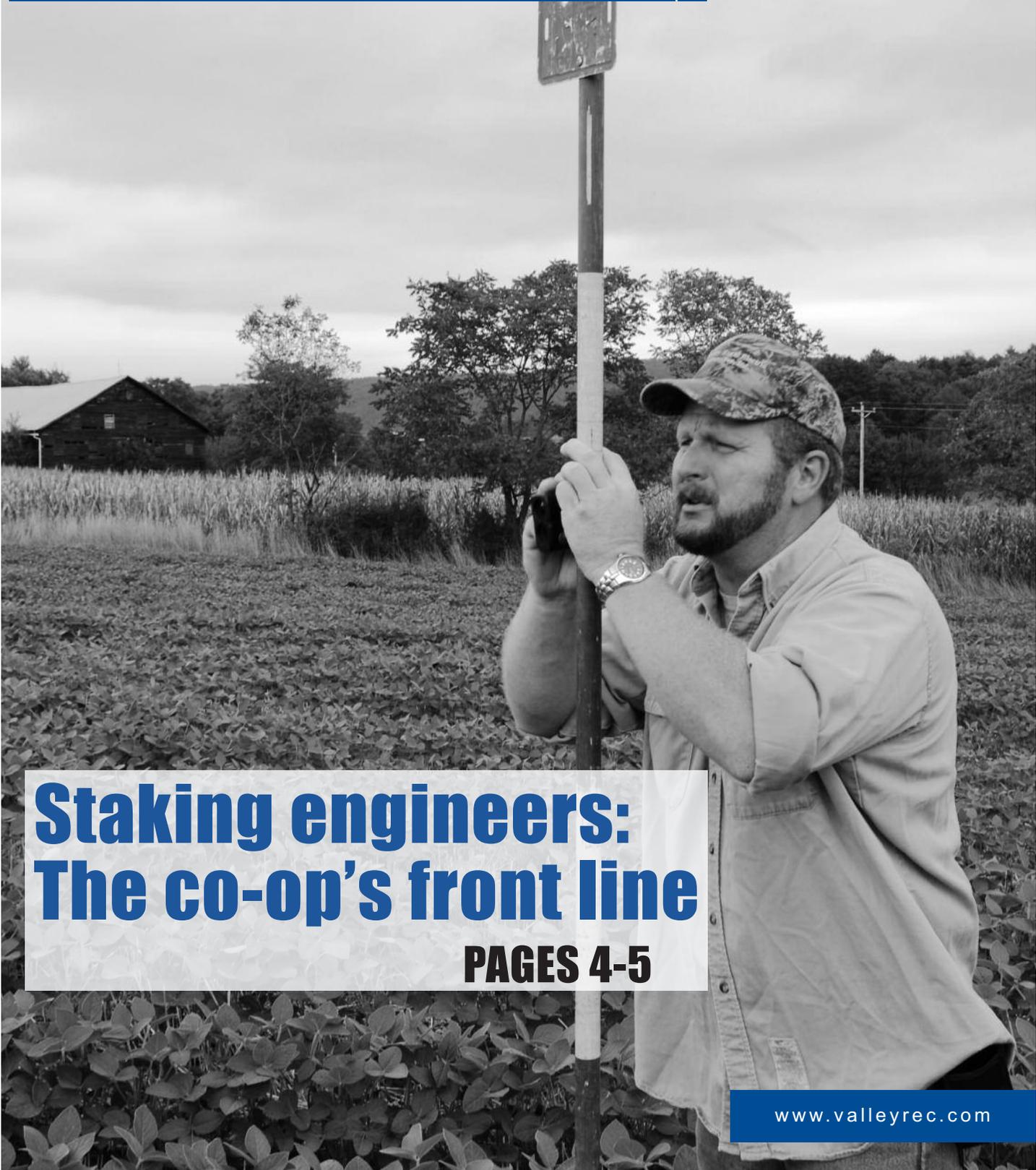


Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Valley News

November | December 2013

Volume 70 | Issue 6



Staking engineers: The co-op's front line

PAGES 4-5

www.valleyrec.com

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Celebrating 75 years of safe, affordable electric service

As the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays approach, many of us will take more time to visit family. Perhaps we'll slow down enough to spend a few hours with loved ones looking through old photo albums. If you find yourself turning through the pages of the past in the coming weeks, I sincerely hope your trip down memory lane is a joy-filled journey.

If the members of Valley Rural Electric Cooperative had one, all-encompassing photo album, the first pages would date back to the late 1930s, when rural residents were electing the first board of directors and stringing the first lines. The ensuing pages in this album would show successive generations working over a span of 75 years to make our co-op what it is today.

On Nov. 1 Valley REC hit the 75-year mark. I wonder what the co-op's founders would think of this milestone. From those hardscrabble beginnings, the co-op's distribution system now boasts three district offices, a fleet of bucket trucks and an advanced metering infrastructure that can quickly pinpoint the scope of an outage, helping to get power back on for consumers faster.

Members no longer read their own meters and can pay their bills by internet or phone. They can even access www.valleyrec.com and use home energy calculators to learn to use electricity more efficiently.

So much has changed since 1938. But one thing hasn't changed: The co-op runs on the dedication of employees and the involvement of members.

Valley's employees take seriously the mission of providing safe, reliable, affordable electricity to consumers. They also work to improve the quality of life in their communities, in part through an active health and wellness committee that sponsors charitable golf and softball tournaments and participates in other fundraisers.

As a co-op member, you can be involved by attending your district nominating meeting and the annual meeting. They offer you an opportunity to hear an update on the operation of the co-op, to ask questions and to elect board members. You have a say because it's your



business.

For 75 years, employees have been dedicated to and members have been involved in this cooperative. That combination has blessed our area with affordable, reliable electricity — something that has played a big part in making so many of the memories in those old photo albums.

Happy holidays from all of us here at Valley Rural Electric Co-op.
Cooperatively yours,

Doug Roles
Director of Member Services



On the cover ...
Staking engineers, such as Mike Lansberry, travel Valley REC territory meeting members and laying out new services. The job requires people skills, math skills and, sometimes, a lot of hiking. See story on Page 4.

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Valley REC linemen Jason Wilson (left) and Mike Williams make a live-wire connection. (Photo by Doug Roles)

Safety first:

Valley REC crews complete annual hot line training

By Doug Roles

Director of Member Services

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative's line crews completed on-the-job safety training in October. The annual training, offered through the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association, provides line crews an opportunity to work with energized lines as a PREA safety instructor ensures safe work practices are followed.

Crews from all three Valley service districts — Huntingdon, Martinsburg and Shade Gap — participated in the training held Oct. 1-3.

"They usually try to have a job that's a little more complicated than normal," said Bill Succowich, PREA job training and safety instructor. "We just critique what they're doing."

As a crew worked to move an energized line to a new pole along Route 35 in Reeds Gap, Juniata County, Bill monitored their progress, paying particular attention to how the linemen had placed insulating coverings on the wires. A nearby oil-circuit recloser (a switch that can cut power in the event of a fault) was placed on "lockout" to make the work safer for the line crew

by shutting off power at the first fault instead of trying to re-close as usual.

"It's quite a congested pole they're working on," Bill said, noting the placement of the wires, a transformer and an overhead guy wire. "They're doing very well. I didn't see any bad habits."

By the end of the day, the crew had moved the live wire and guy wire to a new 55-foot pole and installed a new transformer. Similar projects were completed in Tyrone and Huston townships, Blair County in the next two days with crews

from Martinsburg and Huntingdon participating.

"All work was done hot, with rubber sleeves, gloves and other safety gear," said Shade Gap District Manager Rick Poleck. "It's energized. It's slow going because they have to use hot sticks and gloves, but it's good training."

Far left: Using four bucket lifts, line crews move an energized line to a new pole along Route 35 in Reeds Gap, Juniata County. **Inset photo:** Linemen Wilmer "Tink" Bucher (left) and Adam Atherton work together to move an old transformer out of the work area. (Photos by Doug Roles)



A lot at stake



Valley's stakers value engineer member dreams

By Doug Roles

Director of Member Services

To the casual observer it might look like a simple job: You go out and pound a wooden stake into the ground where the next utility pole goes. But Valley Rural Electric employees who work as staking engineers know there's much more to it.

The job mixes office and field work. It's part getting your hands dirty and part public relations. To be successful, staking engineers have to have a mix of people skills and technical skills. In fact, in the electric co-op world, "stakers" are called the face of the co-op because they're often the first employees a member meets.

"That first contact is critical," says Tim Cisney, who retired from Valley REC in January after 27 years in staking. "Staking engineers actually start the building process and they're the last ones to handle the work order."

"Stakers are involved in the whole process. Everything done actually goes through the staking engineer," Tim says.

Stakers do some of the initial paperwork to sign up new members. And they talk to property owners about the layout of new services. In this way, Valley's stakers get to be involved as members plan construction

of their dream homes or expand businesses.

Staking engineers work in all kinds of weather, walking rights-of-way and checking lines and poles to find equipment that needs repaired or replaced. During storms they patrol lines to identify places where lines have been damaged. When they find problems, they create a work order for the line crew.

Part of the job is to contact PA One Call to report placement of new poles or other work. In the field, stakers also create GPS data points which they provide to Valley REC's mapping department to keep maps up to date.

While working in Todd Township, Huntingdon County in February, staking engineers Mike Lansberry and Jason Hey explained the process of laying out service to a new home site.

"We have to keep in mind the location of trees and distance from limbs," Jason says, while using a transit to lay out several

spans of wire from the existing line to the build site.

"We like the members to call ahead of construction or even before purchasing ground," Mike says. "It's important for those planning to build a home to know if they'll even have an easement for an electric line. Always make sure you will have a



Valley REC staking engineers, from left, Mike Lansberry, Patrick "Turtle" Lightner and Tim Cisney (now retired) meet at the Shade Gap district office in early 2013 to train on new mapping software. Top: Lansberry (right) and Jason Hey map out service to a home site in Todd Township, Huntingdon County, in February. (Photos by Doug Roles)



Above: Staking engineer Jason Hey uses a transit to select the route of a new line through a right-of-way. At right: Mike Lansberry uses GPS technology to plot a service drop to a turkey barn being built near Marklesburg, Huntingdon County in September. The GPS antennae is on top of his hat. (Photos by Doug Roles)

right of way before buying or building.”

At this job, Mike, who works out of the Huntingdon district office, had a preliminary appointment with the property owner. Then he and Jason staked out the line. Mike points out that staking engineers have to lay out new service in the most economical fashion.

“You have to value engineer it,” he says. “You don’t want these costs so high that operational costs to the entire membership go up. You have to do what’s best for the membership, not just the member.”

Once the staking engineers have completed the field work, they load the data into a computer and create a work ticket. The district manager (or other personnel) will then visit the site to see what all is entailed in the line construction and will then schedule the job.

“Design. Stake. Collect data. Populate to our database. It’s a step-by-step process,” Mike explains. “It’s very rewarding; you get to see the job from the start to the end.”

“It’s one of the most diverse jobs at the co-op,” adds Jason, who works from Valley REC’s Martinsburg office.

On a site visit in another location in Todd Township, in September, Lansberry had to lay out a connection to a new turkey barn.

Using a laser range finder and GPS, he found that the new line crosses a soy bean field for 1,200 feet to the underground connection at the barn. The distance of the new line was divided into four 300-foot spans, equally distributing the weight of the line. Mike then put together a materials list — an item that is critical beyond the initial building of the new service.

Inventory created by stakers is invaluable to the co-op in outage restoration. For example, if a car crashes into a co-op pole, staking engineers can check their records and see the size of wire and equipment (nuts, bolts, crossarms, etc.) at the site, enabling a repair crew to head out carrying the necessary supplies.

Work orders created by staking engineers also drive inventory. They tell warehouse

personnel what materials are being drawn and what quantities of supplies to order.

It’s a process that evolves to become ever more efficient. Tim points out that stakers today can complete a site visit and input their notes into handheld computers while in the field.

“Everything was paper and pencil when I started out. You’d handwrite on a staking sheet and draw a diagram and then go back and put it in a computer; now it’s all computers and GPS,” Tim notes.

Patrick “Turtle” Lightner has been learning the new technology over the past year. After working for a decade as a lineman, he

joined the staking ranks. He says it can appear that staking engineers “just ride around in their trucks.”

“You look at it from a lineman’s perspective and think ‘How hard can it be?’” says Turtle. “It’s a lot more involved. It’s not easy. There’s a lot of behind the scenes work — phone calls to members, getting permissions and rights-of-way.”

“It’s hugely important for inventory. The work orders for the guys have to be right — for cost, for the company and for making sure the member and the co-op are getting a fair deal.”

Turtle says that larger projects often require stakers to work together to make the work of determining spans and

angles go more quickly. He enjoys both the technical and human aspects of the job.

“It’s challenging. And I enjoy meeting people. Occasionally there are issues to resolve with members but I look to go out and put a good foot forward for the co-op and let the members know we’re here to serve them,” he says. “I think the biggest thing is making sure that the member is clear on how things are going to work when it comes to rights-of-way and costs of installing service. Tim used to say it all the time: ‘Be sure the member understands what we’re doing together.’”



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