

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



The 'township question'

By Doug Roles, *Vice President of Member Services*

IN MANY work settings, employees become accustomed to everyday background sounds. Often, they're no longer conscious of office chatter, machinery operating or a ringing phone (if it's not theirs). Recently, I noticed that one of the things I hardly notice anymore is an oft-repeated question from down the hall.

One of several consumer service representatives could be staffing our front desk and receiving member phone calls, but one of the first questions to callers remains the same. I never actually counted how many times a day I hear a cheery voice ask "What township is the property in?" I'm betting the average is seven. That seems about right. At least it's what my subconscious brain is telling me. On some busy days, that number could be well into double digits.

Since I'm only hearing one side of the conversation, I never get the geographic answer. It's hard to guess because it could be one of 65 townships. Regardless of where the answer lies, the question says a lot about Valley REC, when I pay it some attention.


The question reminds me that, when members call our office, they get a live person eager to assist them. Asking the location of your property speeds our process. Whether you're calling about a flickering area light, a right-of-way question, or a billing concern, we'll need to put you through to the right district office or department.

Back on my side of the call, the "township question" also reminds me that, though Valley REC's service

territory sprawls through eight counties in southcentral Pennsylvania, we're committed to serving all our members as promptly as possible. Having district offices in Martinsburg, Huntingdon and Shade Gap means that our crews are spread out, too. We can reach the most distant corners of our service territory fairly quickly.

And our employees live in the communities they serve. Chances are that the township you're in is also home to one of our lineworkers, staking engineers or office workers.

Many rural electric co-ops have seen great growth in portions of their territories that were once farmland. There are "rural" co-ops that serve largely suburban townships. But there was a time when these places were among "the most remote, rural areas," the places electric co-ops pledged to serve. Valley does have accounts in a few small boroughs. How we came to serve them, and large swaths of townships, harkens back to the beginnings of the co-op, when private power companies would not serve these low-population locales, prompting rural residents to found co-ops and sign up members across the countryside.

As with real estate, location is everything in serving our members. So, if you call us with a question and in return you're asked "the township question," appreciate it for all it represents. I know I will, if I'm noticing it. Who knows, I may even be putting a hashmark on my notepad. Now, was that five calls so far today, or six? 

Co-op begins work on replacement of 1950s-era Atkinson Mills Substation

By Doug Roles

Vice President of Member Services

VALLEY Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) is continuing its effort to upgrade aging substations on the co-op's electric distribution system. At the start of the summer, a contractor began site preparation for a new substation in Mifflin County, a year after completing construction of another new substation in Franklin County.

Valley REC's system includes 22 substations. In progress now is the replacement of the aging Atkinson Mills Substation in Wayne Township. The wooden structure substation dates back to the 1950s.

"We're building a brand-new Atkinson Mills Substation next to the existing one," says Todd Ross, Valley REC's vice president of operations.

"Once we're done, we'll tear down the old one," Ross adds. "That space will be used for parking next to the new substation and better access."

In 2019, Valley REC purchased an acre of ground adjacent the existing Atkinson Mills facility to have space for the new substation. The new substation will be of steel-frame construction.

Motorists passing the site along Route 22 will see that concrete pads have been poured and steel erection work has started. Tri-M, a utility contractor based in the Philadelphia area, is doing the construction work. It's anticipated that the project will be completed by late fall. The Atkinson Mills Substation is located in the co-op's Huntingdon service district and provides electric service to co-op members in Wayne, Oliver, and Granville townships. Co-op members there should not experience service interruptions related to the construction.

Tri-M also built Valley REC's new Path Valley Substation near Fort Loudon, Franklin County, which was energized last October. That facility was constructed at a new site and



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

CHANGING TIMES: Valley REC's existing Atkinson Mills Substation is a wooden frame structure that dates to the 1950s. The co-op is replacing it with a new steel-frame substation at the same location in Wayne Township, Mifflin County.

replaced the Metal Substation in Metal Township, Franklin County. The Metal site now houses a regulator bank. The Metal and Path Valley facilities are in Valley REC's Shade Gap service district.

Replacement of aging substation infrastructure has been a focus for Valley REC. In October 2016, the co-op energized the new Reeds Gap Substation, in Tuscarora Township, Juniata County, also in the Shade Gap District.

Last year, the co-op purchased a

site for construction of a new Sinking Valley Substation in Tyrone Township, Blair County. The new substation will be located about half a mile north of the existing facility near Route 453.

Site preparation for that project may get underway late this year. The project will update 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) traverses a steep ridge. ☀

Insulator upgrade



PHOTOS BY DOUG ROLES

A crew from The Tri-M Group of Lock Haven replaces worn and damaged porcelain insulators on Valley REC lines in the areas of Harrisonville and Needmore in Fulton County. The crew installed new composite insulators. Manny Paniagua (in bucket), a Tri-M foreman, is shown at left setting a new insulator. The new equipment can be seen in the center of the photo above at right. The work was done with lines energized and did not cause loss of service to members.

Power surges and blinks explained

Have you ever noticed your lights blink during a thunderstorm? Or perhaps you've noticed a blinking microwave clock when you arrive home. When this happens, you've likely experienced a brief disruption to your electric service, which could have resulted from a power surge or blink. While the symptoms of surges and blinks can appear similar, what's happening behind the scenes can be quite different.

What's a power surge?

Power surges are brief overvoltage spikes or disturbances of a power waveform that can damage, degrade or destroy electronic equipment within your home or business. Most electronics are designed to handle small variations in voltage; however, power surges can reach amplitudes of tens of thousands of volts — this can be extremely damaging to your electronic equipment.

Surges can be caused by internal sources, like HVAC systems with variable frequency drives, or external

sources, like lightning and damage to power lines and transformers.

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative encourages all members to install surge protective devices (such as surge protector power strips) to safeguard your sensitive electronics. If you're experiencing frequent surges in your home or business and you believe the cause is internal, contact a qualified electrician to inspect your electrical system.


What's a power blink?

Power blinks are also brief service interruptions, but they're typically caused by a fault (short circuit) on a power line or a protective device that's working in reaction to the fault. Faults can occur through a variety of instances, like squirrels, birds or other small animals contacting an energized power line; tree branches touching a power line; or lightning and other similar events. In fact, when it comes to power disruptions caused by critters, squirrels reign supreme. In 2019

alone, squirrels were responsible for more than 1,200 outages, according to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. That's why co-ops, like Valley REC, place animal guards atop poles and even station fake owls on substation fences.

Any of the events noted above can cause your power to blink, but you may also experience a brief interruption when protective devices that act like circuit breakers are working to detect the fault. Believe it or not, these brief power blinks caused by protective devices are actually good, because that means the equipment is working as it should to prevent a prolonged outage.

Regardless of the cause, our crews will be on their way to inspect the damage and make necessary repairs after a power outage.

And you can help, too! Any time you experience repeated disruptions to your electric service, please let us know by calling 800-432-0680 or emailing memberservices@valleyrec.com. 



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Valley Rural Electric Cooperative awards 15 \$1,000 scholarships to local students

VALLEY Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) recently awarded 15 \$1,000 scholarships to high school seniors as well as students already enrolled in post-secondary institutions for the 2021-22 academic year.

The co-op's Brighter Future Scholarship Program was established in 2010 to assist eligible students who are cooperative members or their dependents. To date, Valley REC has conferred nearly \$240,000 in scholarship grants. Selection criteria include academic achievement, school activities and community service.

The money to finance this initiative comes from unclaimed capital credits refunds that previously had to be turned over to the state treasury. But thanks to the efforts of the cooperative's political advocates, these resources can now be kept in co-op communities and used to assist consumers facing financial hardships, to



support civic organizations and to fund educational programs.

The following 13 public high school students received scholarships from Valley REC:

Blair County: Central High School — Jabon C. Butler of Martinsburg, son of Jason and Jennifer Butler, attending Grace College and Seminary; Hollidaysburg Area Senior High School — Travis B. Saylor of Duncansville, son of Tracy and Michelle Saylor, attending Penn State Altoona; Tyrone Area High School — Karly G. Diebold of Altoona, daughter of Ken and Cheryl Diebold, attending Juniata College; and Miranda A. Goodman of Tyrone,

daughter of Jon and Anita Goodman, attending Penn State University; Williamsburg High School — Garrett J. Nicewonger of Williamsburg, son of Lorie Nicewonger, attending Seton Hill University; and Taylor R.

Uplinger also of Williamsburg, daughter of Aaron and Julie Uplinger, attending University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg.

Huntingdon County: Huntingdon Area High School — Sydney K. Houck of Huntingdon, daughter of Debra and John Houck, attending Lock Haven University; and Megan A. Lynn of James Creek, daughter of Andrew and Dawn Lynn, attending Seton Hill University; Juniata Valley High School — Katerina E. Coffman of Petersburg, daughter of Elaine and Thomas Coffman Jr., attending Penn State University; and Sophia J. Wood of Alexandria, daughter of Anne and Greg Wood, also attending Penn State University; Mount Union Area High School — Ian C. Brodbeck of Mount Union, son of Sean and Annette Brodbeck, attending Stevens Institute of Technology; Southern Huntingdon County High School — Rebeca R. Christophel of Three Springs, daughter of Nicolee Christophel, attending Juniata College.

Juniata County: Juniata High School — Marissa T. Woodward of Honey Grove, daughter of Troy and Dea Woodward, attending Delaware Valley University.

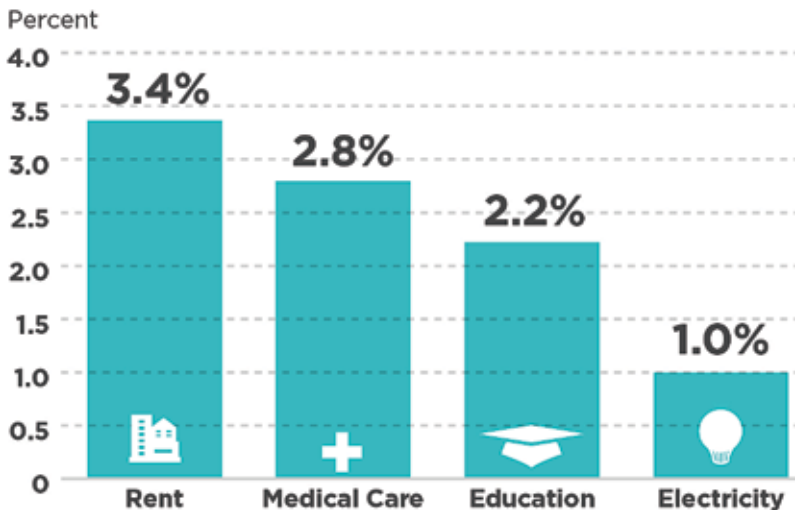
Two high school graduates from a previous year also received scholarships from Valley REC: Mason C. Baker of Martinsburg, son of Brent and Betsy Baker and a 2020 graduate of Central High School, attending Lebanon Valley College; and Alyssa R. Brumbaugh, also of Martinsburg, daughter of Matthew and Amber Brumbaugh and a 2018 graduate of Central High School, attending Penn State Altoona.

Valley Rural Electric is a member-owned cooperative providing electric service to consumers in eight counties of south-central Pennsylvania, including Bedford, Blair, Centre, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata and Mifflin. For more information about Valley Rural Electric Cooperative's Brighter Future Scholarship Program, call 1-800-432-0680 or visit valleyrec.com and follow the Programs and Services link to the Scholarships section. ☀

ELECTRICITY REMAINS A GOOD VALUE

The cost of powering your home rises slowly when compared to other common expenses. Looking at price increases over the last five years, it's easy to see electricity remains a good value!

Average Annual Price Increase 2015-2020



Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
Consumer Price Index