

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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Guest Column



Misadventures in the fridge and freezer

By Doug Roles, *Vice President of Member Services*

I'VE LONG been a fan of short stories about emergencies — accounts such as those found in the *Reader's Digest* “Drama in Real Life” series or the “This Happened to Me” column of *Outdoor Life*. While it's unlikely I'd ever experience most of these mishaps — like falling into a glacial crevasse or trekking through miles of jungle — I suppose I could get lost in the wilderness if I wandered far enough from the truck. And it's not impossible that I'd fend off a bear with a pocket knife.

There is one drama, though, that I've experienced more than I care to remember. It plays out at home, unnoticed until it's too late. Perhaps this has happened to you: You go to the fridge for a snack, not sure about what you want because you're just grazing. You open a plastic container or unzip a storage bag and wish you hadn't. Maybe it's moldy luncheon meat, some fishy fish or leftovers whose best days were a month ago. Either way, you have food that has been wasted.

Spoilage is especially saddening when the loss is a forgotten favorite, a dish that would have been consumed had it not been pushed out of sight and out of mind. The frequency of this occurrence is also disheartening.

It seems that as much as people think about perishable food during a power outage, we collectively don't do very

well the rest of the time. A 2020 Penn State study found American households waste 31.9% of the food they acquire, with two-thirds wasting between 20% to 50%. Even the least wasteful households waste 8.7% of their food. These are tragic stats considering the number of people who face hunger daily.

On a positive note, maybe the next power outage — unwanted, as it is — can serve as a reminder to us all to always be mindful of what's in the fridge and freezer. During a service interruption, the cooperative often receives calls about how long food will last. The thing to remember then is to avoid unnecessarily opening appliance doors since refrigerated foods will last four hours without power while food in a full freezer can last up to 48 hours.

As much as we want to avoid being wasteful, sometimes spoilage is unavoidable. So, when in doubt, throw out any food with an unusual odor, color or texture. To prevent spoilage, try putting new purchases in the rear of the fridge and keep a list of freezer contents. Using see-through storage containers can provide a visual reminder of what's available for snacks and meals. A little forethought can help us all be better at using provisions before we find ourselves in the all-too-common misadventure of good food gone bad. ❁

Big love for people and small horses drives Blair County couple's 'MINistry'

By Doug Roles

Vice President of Member Services

MINIATURE horses have a big purpose for one Blair County couple. Valley REC members Jalynn and Logan Helsel of Duncansville put their draft ponies to work nearly 15 years ago as part of their Silver Creek MINistries faith-based outreach to children and youth.

The Helsels operate Silver Stirrup Tack & Gift, now in its 30th year. And they're branching out into root beer vending and wood branding at their Allegheny Township store and farmstead. Though busy with multiple endeavors — Logan also works full-time for Allegheny Township — they've continued a youth ministry born out of a family tragedy.

The Helsels say their outreach teaches leadership, self-worth and work ethics through caring for horses and other farm animals. Jalynn and Logan began the work after her younger brother, Ashley Focht, 23, was killed in a motor-vehicle accident in August 2004.

"My brother was a bull rider and a lot of people followed him," Jalynn says. "After he died, people would stop by the store to see how I was doing."

She recalls that many visitors expressed their own sadness and would ask how she was able to handle Ashley's loss. Jalynn says she consoled visitors, many of them Ashley's age and younger, by sharing her hope of seeing her brother again. She believes the experience showed her and Logan they were uniquely positioned to share their Christian faith and teach responsibility to area youngsters through their love of horses and loss of a family member.

"We do children's programs with the miniature horses. One of the things children learn about horses is to watch them communicate through their body language," Jalynn says of the dozen or so ponies at their 20-acre facility. "Miniature horses have the same language as larger horses, so the kids learn the



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

ABOVE: Jalynn Helsel pauses for a photo with one of her favorite Silver Creek minis, Ginger. BELOW: The Helsel's property is home to more than a dozen miniature horses, which are a centerpiece of the couple's youth outreach.

language without the danger of being around bigger horses."

"I enjoy our horses, cooking from our chuck wagon, working with leather, cracking a bull whip and firebranding. All of these are effective in mentoring these youth," Logan says. "In working with leather, I sometimes find old brands on the hides. The brand would have been placed on the animal for identification purposes early in life

and remained permanently. I hope we may do the same in the lives of these kids. There may be things here that will make a positive impact and remain with them for the rest of their lives."

The Helsels are concerned that old-fashioned values are eroding. They believe in a hands-on approach, where youths learn about handling horses, grooming, and maintaining stables and equipment. The Helsels say the experience gives young people the privilege of bonding with a horse while showing them how much physical work is involved in caring for the animals.

"It's for young people who have an interest in horses but don't have the space or means to have one of their own," Jalynn explains. "Horses aren't like having a four-wheeler or an ATV."

The Silver Creek MINistries' facility includes an indoor riding arena and an activity building that includes a small chapel. The miniature horses are often incorporated into the Helsel's "MINistry" by being centerpieces in morality skits. Donations have equipped the activity building with a pool table and air hockey and skee ball tables.

Silver Creek MINistries is a 2019 recipient of \$500 from the Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) Community Service Grant Program. The money was used to purchase harnesses and other



PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

SUBMITTED PHOTO



supplies for children to use in readying horses to show at the Bedford County Fair. Silver Creek MINISTRIES is solely funded through donations. The grant funding is administered by the Central Pennsylvania Community Foundation.

Jalynn started Silver Stirrup Tack Shop in 1992. She was 17 and still in high school, but wanted to make quality horse-riding supplies available to the area. Her parents had a rental property along Maple Hollow Road and helped Jalynn start a store there. Logan and Jalynn were dating at the time, and he was eager to partner with her in the endeavor.

"I always wanted to have a tack shop. It's been a learning experience

for 30 years," she says, adding she remembers having to make do with worn tack while growing up in Carson Valley.

The shop carries all manner of horse accoutrements. There's even space for horse owners to back a livestock trailer alongside the building. Saddles can be placed on the horse on-site and also on a horse mannequin so the rider can try it out.

"We specialize in saddle fitting," Jalynn says. "A good saddle has to fit the rider and the horse."

Jalynn operated a dog grooming business for 20 years, but ended it to focus full-time on the tack shop and the ministry. She says there was some divine intervention in the way a freak

flood destroyed her grooming area. Still, the Helsels are game to try new things. A year ago, Jalynn and Logan purchased a friend's Hillbilly Homebrew trailer to sell root beer at local fairs and festivals. Two years ago, Logan got into wood branding, starting SC Branding. He can custom brand lumber or unique wood pieces.

Silver Stirrup Tack & Gift can be reached by phone at 814-695-4530. The store is located along Maple Hollow Road, about a mile west of Duncansville. ❁



ABOVE: Jalynn and Logan Helsel perform whip tricks at Blair County Christian School near Duncansville. LEFT: Miniature horses are led around the indoor riding arena. FAR LEFT: Logan Helsel teaches youngsters how firebranding is done.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS



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

VALLEY Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) recently awarded fifteen \$1,000 scholarships to high school seniors as well as students already enrolled in post-secondary institutions for the 2022-23 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 awarded nearly \$255,000 in scholarship funds. Selection criteria include academic achievement, school activities and community service.

The money to finance this initiative comes from unclaimed capital credits. Valley REC uses these co-op funds 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:

Central High School — Katheryn D. Longenecker of Williamsburg, daughter of Doug and Yvette Longenecker, attending Penn State Altoona; and Haylie A. Mingle of Martinsburg, daughter of Joshua and Lynea Mingle, attending Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Claysburg-Kimmel High School — Cassie R. Berkheimer of Portage, daughter of James and Cheri Berkheimer, attending Saint Francis University.

Forbes Road Jr./Sr. High School — Olivia M. Henry of Hustontown, daughter of Mike and Wendy Henry, attending Juniata College;

and Katie G. Waite of Three Springs, daughter of Jeff and Tammie Waite, attending Shippensburg University.

Halifax Area High School — Ethan K. Snyder of Halifax, son of Lisa Romberger and Dean Snyder, attending Pennsylvania State University.

Hollidaysburg Area Senior High School — Parker N. Zonts of Portage, son of Heather and Dennis Zonts, attending the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown.

Huntingdon County: Huntingdon Area High School — Alison J. Hemch-
(continues on page 14d)

Billing clerk, district secretary enjoying a bountiful retirement

A former Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) billing specialist and district office secretary hopes to fill her retirement with travel, gardening and service to others. Nancy Bucher of Mount Union retired at the end of 2021 after two decades at the co-op.

Nancy began her career with Valley REC in April 2002 at the corporate office, which was then located along Route 26 north of Huntingdon.

“Sharon Isenberg was the one who hired me. She was the office services supervisor,” Nancy recalls of a longtime Valley REC staffer who retired in 2007. “I worked as a cashier processing members’ payments.

“We did quite a few things in office services,” Nancy adds. “I was the backup for new services, and I did transfers.”

Nancy says the biggest change during her time with Valley REC was the increased use of computers and automation in processing payments and in outage restoration.

“It never bothered me. I like change. I like to learn new things,” Nancy says. “We keyed everything in by hand, when I started. We didn’t scan anything. For outages, we would write information down by hand and call the crews and pass on the information to them.”

Five years into her career, the co-op moved the corporate office to its present location along Fairground Road, Huntingdon. Nancy took on the job of billing clerk three years later and at the end of 2017 moved to the Shade Gap district office where she took on the additional role of district office secretary.

Nancy’s husband, Tink, is a crew leader at the Shade Gap district. He has worked for Valley REC for 22 years.

Before joining the Valley team, Nancy worked as a com-



HOMEGROWN: The pile of cucumbers and squash next to the sink means there’s more canning to be done. Nancy Bucher is filling her retirement with a mix of gardening, travel and volunteering with her church.

PHOTO BY DOUG ROLES

mercial lines rater at Swigart Insurance, Huntingdon. She also worked as an interpreter for deaf kindergarten students in the Mount Union Area School District and worked in billing at Centre Business Products, Mount Union.

Nancy and Tink enjoy gardening and raise corn, cabbage, beans, tomatoes and other vegetables. Nancy also takes care of yardwork while Tink is on the job and does a lot of canning. She enjoys camping and day trips with family and also volunteers at her church, New Life Fellowship, near Mount Union. She and her sister, Suzanne, recently helped with arts and crafts at a children’s program for 21 kids, from kindergarten to sixth grade. Nancy also sings in the choir.

Nancy is also trying to put some new life into old furniture. She’s currently refinishing a coffee table for a family member and is considering taking on additional work.

“I like to refinish furniture. That’s something I’ve always wanted to do,” Nancy explains. “I love stripping and repainting.”

Nancy is proving the saying of so many retirees who don’t remember how they had time to work full time. We wish Nancy an active yet restful retirement. ☀

Scholarship

er of Huntingdon, daughter of Patricia and James Hemcher, attending Georgetown University.

Mount Union Area High School — Abigail J. Aurand of Shirleysburg, granddaughter of Brenda and Dennis Estep, attending Pennsylvania Highlands Community College; and Devin R. Delo of Mount Union, son of Robert and Elizabeth Delo, attending Waynesburg University.

Southern Huntingdon County High School — William U. Black III of Mapleton Depot, son of Christy and Bill Black, attending Pennsylvania State

University; and Jennifer N. Hess of Blairs Mills, daughter of Tara and Dave Hess, attending Lock Haven University.

Tussey Mountain High School — Kiersten E. Baker of James Creek, daughter of Adam and Peggy Baker, attending Pennsylvania State University.

Two high school graduates from previous years also received scholarships from Valley REC: Brittney N. McMullen of Shade Gap, daughter of Richard and Tracey McMullen and a 2019 graduate of Southern Huntingdon County High School, attending Juniata College; and Josie F. Mills of Rockhill

Furnace, daughter of Craig and Tammy Mills and a 2021 graduate of Commonwealth Charter Academy, attending the University of Pittsburgh.

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 REC’s Brighter Future Scholarship Program, call 800-432-0680 or visit valleyrec.com and follow the “Programs and Services” tab to the “Scholarships” section. ☀