

# 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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### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Monday - Thursday  
7 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

**Huntingdon/Martinsburg/Shade Gap**

**Office Hours**  
Monday - Thursday  
7 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

**Outages & Emergencies**  
1-800-432-0680

## Guest Column

# Start Off the New Year Right with Some Financial Housekeeping



**MELISSA SHETROM**

**FOR MANY PEOPLE**, the turn of the calendar to January means New Year's resolutions and setting goals. It's a good time to take stock of household finances, too. One piece of housekeeping that can save you hassle and money is to make sure your account information is up to date with vendors and service providers like Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC), especially if you use some form of automatic bill payment.

While consumers have more options and more convenience than ever for bill payment, there can be unforeseen challenges in this age of electronic transactions. I've heard from members who closed credit card accounts — due to identity theft or cards being stolen — but forgot to update their automatic payment with the co-op when they received their new card. You guessed it: They didn't realize something was wrong until we notified them.

The same scenario can play out when a card expires, and the cardholder forgets to update accounts to be paid with the replacement card. It's a good idea to keep a list of what credit cards are used to pay different bills. Making sure a valid credit card is associated with your electronic payment will avoid possible late fees, sparing your budget an unnecessary expense. For those who don't want the worry of updating their credit card information, using a checking account for recurring payments is reliable because bank account and routing numbers never expire and change less frequently than credit card numbers.

We understand times are tough for many people. In fact, the most recent Federal Reserve Survey found only 63% of Americans could cover a surprise \$400 emergency with cash on hand. We certainly don't want members to have to pay additional fees because their payment method didn't work. That's why Valley REC offers a variety of ways for you to pay your electric bill. We encourage members to pick an option that works best for their household. As always, if you think you're going to have difficulty making a payment, contact the co-op right away, rather than waiting until an account is overdue.

To pay your electric bill securely over the phone, call toll-free 866-999-4591 and follow the automated prompts. Payments can be made by credit or debit card or from a checking account any time of the day or night. You can also pay using our SmartHub platform at valleyrec.com. Both systems allow for automatic payment.

For those more comfortable with the tried and true, we accept paper checks by mail, in-person at our office or at our after-hours drop box. We still accept cash at our front counter, too — and we'll even give you a receipt!

We wish you a happy and prosperous new year as we continue to do everything possible to deliver safe, reliable power as affordably as possible. 🌱

**MELISSA SHETROM**  
BILLING/CSR SUPERVISOR

# Co-op to Replace Three Springs Substation in Busy 2024

**DOUG ROLES,** VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBER SERVICES

**VALLEY RURAL ELECTRIC** Cooperative (REC) operations personnel have several maintenance and improvement projects planned for 2024 as the cooperative continues to improve system reliability and power quality. The co-op is planning to replace the final 1950s-era substation still in operation along with aging wire throughout the distribution system.

These projects will take place as Valley REC continues to conduct routine pole inspections and vegetation trimming along rights of way.

“The big job this year is that we’re going to upgrade the Three Springs substation at its current location,” Valley REC Vice President of Operations Todd Ross says. “The Three Springs substation has been in use there for more than 70 years.”

The substation is in Cromwell Township, Huntingdon County. The project will be the fourth substation upgrade for Valley REC in approximately four years and will include converting lines in Cromwell, Clay and Springfield townships from 7,200 volts to 14,400 volts. Ross says the impact to members, through planned outages, should be minimal.

“We’re going to do most of that work hot,” he says of conversion work to be completed while lines remain energized. At times during construction, operations personnel will reroute power from the co-op’s Clear Ridge and Riverview substations — in Taylor Township, Fulton County, and Shirley Township, Huntingdon County — to members normally served by the Three Springs substation.

In 2023, Valley REC energized its new Sinking Valley substation about a half mile from the former Blair County site. The co-op also energized a new Atkinson Mills substation in Mifflin County in November 2021 on the site of the former facility and built the new Path Valley substation



**ABOVE:** Valley REC will replace the aging Three Springs substation this year with a new facility in the same location in Cromwell Township, Huntingdon County.

**BELOW:** Also in 2024, the co-op will complete service connections at the Graystone Cottage Community in Spruce Creek Township, Huntingdon County.

in Peters Township, Franklin County, in 2020. Work to upgrade aging substations boosts system reliability and provides greater ability for backfeeding portions of the system during an outage.

In 2016, Valley REC built a new Reeds Gap substation in Tuscarora Township, Juniata County, again replacing an older substation.

Many factors influence maintenance and improvement planning. The co-op must weigh costs and benefits and plan for future growth without overbuilding the system. Ross says one upgrade that makes sense is replacing aging wire with new, rust-resistant conductor of nearly the same size.

“Systemwide, in all three districts, we’re going through and replacing aluminum-conductor, steel-reinforced wire with all-aluminum conductor,” Ross says. “That work will be ongoing.”

In Spruce Creek Township,



Huntingdon County, the co-op will be completing its involvement in the Graystone Cottage Community housing development. Connection of service to 85 homes, from underground wire, will wrap up early this year.

Pole inspection work throughout the system will take place as usual over the summer to identify deteriorating utility poles for replacement. And the co-op will continue an aggressive right-of-way maintenance program. Valley REC Utility Forester/Arborist Kevin Detwiler says the

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# Scholarship Application Season Begins

## VALLEY RURAL ELECTRIC

Cooperative (REC) will award up to 15 Brighter Future scholarships of \$1,000 each this year to eligible students.

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 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 2024-2025 academic year.

Previous Brighter Future scholarship recipients are not eligible.

## How to apply

Applications will be available at the end of January on [valleyrec.com](http://valleyrec.com) via the “Programs and Services” link to the “Scholarships” section.

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

## Busy 2024

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co-op plans vegetation management work so tree trimming is completed across the entire system every five years.

“It’s usually around 400 miles of primary overhead clearing annually,” Detwiler says. “We work on that the entire year.”

Members are notified by mail and door hangers as contracted trimming crews work in their areas. 📧



Applications will also be available at all Valley REC offices and in the guidance offices of the following public high schools (HS):

- ▶ Altoona Area HS
- ▶ Central HS
- ▶ Claysburg-Kimmel HS
- ▶ Fannett-Metal HS
- ▶ Forbes Road Junior/Senior HS
- ▶ Hollidaysburg Area Senior HS
- ▶ Huntingdon Area HS
- ▶ Juniata HS
- ▶ Juniata Valley HS
- ▶ McConnellsburg HS
- ▶ Mifflin County HS

- ▶ Mount Union Area HS
- ▶ Northern Bedford County HS
- ▶ Southern Fulton Junior/Senior HS
- ▶ Southern Huntingdon County HS
- ▶ Tussey Mountain HS
- ▶ Tyrone Area HS
- ▶ Williamsburg HS

## Application deadline

Applications and all required information must be delivered to a Valley REC office or postmarked by March 31.

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

Please direct any questions to [brighterfuture@valleyrec.com](mailto:brighterfuture@valleyrec.com) or call 800-432-0680. 📞

## Valley REC Offers Scholarships for Member, Non-member High School Juniors

Valley REC’s board of directors wants to recognize the most scholarly and community-minded young leaders by inviting high school juniors to apply for our new scholarship. This educational award is separate from our Brighter Future scholarship program, which is open to high school seniors and adult students. In this program, scholarship funding is awarded directly to students and can be used toward future education-related expenses.

The committee of cooperative directors will select recipients based on academic achievement, as well as participation in extracurricular activities and/or community service. Successful applicants will receive their grant in mid-June. This opportunity is open to students in the 18 public school districts that lie wholly or in part in Valley REC service territory (see list above). Students may apply whether or not their household is served by Valley REC.

Home-schooled and private/cyber school students in our service area are also welcome to apply. Juniors whose parents/guardians are seasonal Valley REC account holders are also eligible. Applications will be available in high school guidance offices and online at [valleyrec.com](http://valleyrec.com) under the “Programs & Services” menu. Applications must be received at Valley REC by April 7.



# Retiree Reflects on Safe, Successful Co-op Career

**DOUG ROLES**, VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBER SERVICES

A LONGTIME VALLEY RURAL ELECTRIC Cooperative (REC) employee is enjoying a retirement filled with a mix of recreation, volunteering and projects around his property. Randy Boonie retired in January 2023 as the co-op's Huntingdon district manager. Randy began his co-op career in May 1989.

The Petersburg area native is a 1985 graduate of Juniata Valley High School. After high school, he spent three and a half years in the Air Force. He was stationed at Ellsworth Airforce Base, South Dakota, and worked as a military firefighter. He went from putting out fires to keeping the lights on.

"I went right to Valley; I was discharged April 20 and started at the co-op May 28," Randy recalls. "I worked in the warehouse for a year. Then I went on a line crew as an apprentice."

Randy worked from the co-op's former location along Route 26, just north of Huntingdon. He says he started line work as a ground hand and worked his way through the ranks in much the same way new co-op lineworkers do today. He noted, however, it's much more common now for new lineworkers to have attended a lineworker certificate school or even a degree program before entering the industry.

"I went through the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association (PREA) schools," Randy recalls. "I was in the first climbing school PREA ever had."

In five years, Randy became a journeyman, and five years later, he was promoted to a crew leader position. In 2009, he became district manager.

Randy saw a lot of change in his more than 30 years with the co-op. Two of the biggest changes, he said, were in equipment and facilities.

"Everything was out along Route 26 at one time," he says. "When I started, we had one bucket truck in



**HAPPILY RETIRED:** Randy Boonie of Petersburg pauses for a photo in his woodshop. Randy retired from Valley Rural Electric Cooperative in January 2023 with more than 30 years of service, including nearly 13 years as the Huntingdon district manager.

Dubois-based United Electric Cooperative, during storm-related mutual-aid

Huntingdon and two digger trucks."

Shortly after Randy's hiring, the Huntingdon district acquired another bucket truck. The service truck at that time was a pickup outfitted with utility boxes.

"We didn't have any wire pullers or track diggers," he recalls. "It wasn't unusual every now and then to have to dig a hole by hand for an anchor or even for a pole."

In 2009, Valley moved Huntingdon district personnel to the current Station Road location, just south of Huntingdon. The corporate staff had moved to the current Fairgrounds Road location two years earlier.

The launch of Valley REC's digital metering was also a big change, providing the co-op greater outage management capability and doing away with members reading their own meters. Randy remembers meters for seasonal accounts, such as hunting camps, were read annually by lineworkers at one time.

"Every fall, we'd go out and manually read all the seasonal accounts," he remembers, noting co-op personnel either collected payment from delinquent accounts or disconnected service. "Collect or disconnect was on the first day of deer season."

One thing that didn't change was the pride Randy took in the job. He remembers specific outage events in Valley REC territory as well as lending a hand to other Pennsylvania co-ops, such as Sullivan County REC and

events.

"Looking back, there was a lot of satisfaction during outage restoration," he recalls. "There was a lot of satisfaction when you closed that switch and saw the lights come on down the valley."

Randy hopes lineworkers just starting in the field will take pride in their work.

"Safety needs to be the No. 1 priority," he advises. "It's a great way to make a living and raise a family, but you definitely have to be focused on safety."

Since retiring, Randy has been doing some hunting and fixing up a building along Route 305, which once was his great-grandfather Charles Boonie Sr.'s garage, service station, and store. He also enjoys having more time to volunteer with Shavers Creek Volunteer Fire Company. He is a life member of the fire company, having started as a junior firefighter.

"The best thing about being retired is all the things you used to try to get done on the weekends you can do at your leisure and then spend weekends with family," Randy says.

Randy's wife, Kim, is a business manager for Penn State University. Randy says she hopes to retire within the next two years, and then there will be a new aspect to retired life.

"We're planning on traveling," Randy explains with a grin. "We have a fifth-wheel camper, and it's going to be wherever the road takes us." 🚚