

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

Return of Capital Credits Helps Make the Season Bright



TERRI BRUMBAUGH

AS THE SONG SAYS, “It’s the most wonderful time of the year!” Yes, the holidays are upon us. It’s time for family gatherings, holiday shopping and gift-giving. This is also the month when Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) members see something extra on their monthly statement — their capital credits returns.

If you’ve been a member for a while, you may have been looking forward to seeing this bill credit. In case you’re not familiar with capital credits, let me explain.

When you signed up to receive electric service from Valley REC, whether that was recently or a few years ago, you did not become a customer of an electric utility. You became a consumer-member of a not-for-profit cooperative. Because Valley REC operates at cost, we give back to our members instead of outside investors or shareholders.

As the graphic below shows, the co-op sets rates to generate enough revenue to pay expenses, make payments on any loans and have an emergency reserve. At the end of each year, we subtract expenses from the revenue collected. We call the balance an operating margin, but you can call it a reduction in this month’s electric bill!

The return of capital credits represents more than the equity of the business. It serves as a reminder that decisions are made based on what’s best for our membership, not on increasing profit margins. Over the years, we have returned nearly \$41 million to our members and former members.

I say “former members” because if you are moving and will no longer have an account with us — or if you know someone who has done so — you may still be owed capital credits. We mail checks to former members, so please make sure we have your up-to-date address information.

Capital credits are just one of the many benefits of co-op membership. To us, you’re more than a customer — you’re the reason we exist. This holiday season, we hope you’re proud to be part of a community-focused co-op that puts people before profits. 🎁

TERRI BRUMBAUGH

OFFICE SERVICES/CAPITAL CREDITS CLERK

HOW CAPITAL CREDITS WORK

Electric co-ops are not-for-profit and operate at cost. Capital credits are a financial benefit of co-op membership.

1. Members pay their electric bills, and we track their business with us each month.
2. The co-op pays operating expenses throughout the year and allocates any leftover operating revenue as capital credits.
3. When financial conditions permit, the co-op board votes to retire (pay) capital credits to the members.
4. We send members their share of capital credits as a bill credit or check.

Huntingdon Arts Center Director Marks Decade of Service

DOUG ROLES, VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBER SERVICES

THE VARIETY OF UNIQUE PAINTINGS, pottery and photography by local artists makes a visit to the Huntingdon County Arts Center well worth the time, says John Kearns, executive director of the Huntingdon County Arts Council and member of Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) since 1983.

This month marks 10 years of service for John as director. His experience and passion for the arts have steered the organization through two relocations and a program expansion during his tenure. His background is as varied as the pieces on display at the church-turned-gallery at 12th and Mifflin streets in Huntingdon.

In 2008, John approached one of the council's former executive directors to volunteer at the Greenwood Furnace Folk Gathering (now the Pennsylvania Folk Gathering, since it moved from Greenwood Furnace State Park to Petersburg).

"I started out directing traffic at Greenwood, and then I got asked to be part of the board," John recalls. "I grew up in the folk music era. That was big at Penn State when I went to college."

John served on the council's board until 2014. When the executive director position became vacant,



COLORFUL SETTING: John Kearns, a Valley REC member, is marking 10 years as executive director of the Huntingdon County Arts Council. He enjoys promoting the arts in rural Pennsylvania and encourages local artists to learn more about exhibiting their work at the Huntingdon County Arts Center.

he resigned from the board to be considered for the position. He hasn't regretted his decision and says the job of promoting the arts in a rural area suits him. He is the ninth executive director of the council, which formed in 1972, and has been on the job for some of the council's busiest and most challenging years.

"The major thing that happened is in April 2022 we bought the former Methodist church at 12th and Mifflin streets," John says. "It was a long process. Board members found local donors to help. It was a big lift, but it's allowed us to greatly expand our offerings."

The 150-year-old building became available when the congregation decided to move to nearby McConnellstown. The council is currently exploring options for replacing the roof and installing a lift system to make the sprawling, four-level building more accessible to those with disabilities. Previously, the center operated at a much smaller, leased property on Fourth Street.

"COVID-19 hit, and we couldn't afford rent anymore at Fourth Street; all our sources of funding dried up," John recalls, adding the center offered no activities from March to September that year. "In March 2020, we moved to the McConnellstown Playhouse. We used the front rooms for art exhibits until we bought the church"

Settled into its new location, the arts council has kept a busy schedule with many public offerings. This fall's highlights included a series of creative writing classes, poetry readings, a ragtime concert, the folk music gathering, and beginner guitar classes along with regularly scheduled photography club and jazz club meetings. Of course, displays of local art are a mainstay.

Some of the more well-known artists have included Jack Troy, a potter who began the ceramics program at Juniata College, and Evgeny "Geny" Krayushkin, a Valley REC member who creates mixed media pieces that tell stories under the Zheka Art moniker.



ROOM FOR ALL: The Huntingdon County Arts Center provides space for concerts, art displays, and workshops, and is available for use by civic groups. The Art Shoppe offers local art to holiday shoppers.

“We not only get local artists but also regionally known artists,” John explains. “We see a lot of landscapes from rural artists who are capturing the beauty of the area. There are all kinds of people who have terrific talents.”

The Huntingdon council often works with other arts councils to plan exhibits or help artists with a show. Artists do not have to be members of the Huntingdon organization to exhibit there. John credits the success of the center to the exhibiting artists and many volunteers.

“We have a very active board of directors who put in tons of hours to make this successful,” John says.

Susan Wentzel, arts council vice president and another Valley REC member, says the council and the center benefit from John’s presence.

“He’s the first person you think of when you think of the Huntingdon County Arts Council,” Susan says. “He’s been really active in helping us get grants and donations, as well as taking care of the day-to-day operations people don’t think about.”

Susan agrees the church building has expanded the opportunity for interaction with the public and says the large, permanent space has energized the council, too.

“What that has done for us over the past three years is cause a tremendous blossoming of the council,” she says. “Our board members are rejuvenated.”

Susan, who is employed with the Huntingdon Area School District, has caught some of that new energy. In January 2020, she was substituting frequently as an art class instructor and got inspired by the students. She bought a set of fine and ultra-fine Sharpie markers and a tablet and began drawing between classes. Earlier this year, she exhibited her work for the first time while a student in Geny’s Positive Energy art class, which is offered through the Pennsylvania Council for the Arts and the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art.



DOUG ROLES

COME ON IN: Located at 313 12th St., Huntingdon, the Huntingdon County Arts Center is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays.

“That was life-changing,” says Susan, who is interested in multiple mediums. “I call myself an artist now. I have some new things in the works.”

John dabbles in photography, but his specialty is graphic design. He produces the layout for the council’s quarterly print newsletter. As much as the center director position requires a passion for the arts, a variety of other skills, like management and marketing, are required, too, making John’s background a plus.

An Allegheny County native, he majored in horticulture at Penn State University’s main campus, because he “loves growing things.” He grew to love central Pennsylvania and returned to the area after spending a year as a Vista (now AmeriCorps) volunteer in Michigan after college. Returning to Huntingdon, he operated a nursery and perennial garden.

John also served six years in the 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania Army National Guard, as a food and subsistence supplies officer in the 128th Brigade Support Battalion. He worked at the former bookstore in the Huntingdon Plaza and spent 13 years with

a confectionery company calling on retail chain outlets. He has operated his own desktop publishing business, STK Page Design & Printing, since the 1980s, while raising two boys and a girl with his wife, Kathy Tweed, a social worker.

John has had quite the journey to the role he has held for the past decade. He says the challenge now is to build awareness.

“There are still people who don’t know we exist, even though we’re 52 years old,” John says. “We do all kinds of promotions and are actively looking for exhibits for next year. But from the outside, we still look like a church. We have these gorgeous stained-glass windows, but people can’t see in. We need them to come in the door and see all that we offer.”



DOUG ROLES

UNIQUE GIFTS: John Kearns, executive director of the Huntingdon County Arts Council, rings up a sale at the arts center for Patty Hockenberry of Huntingdon and her granddaughter Nikki Jenkins of Warren, Ohio.

Just Another Day in the Office



ON THE JOB: Our lineworkers have all kinds of tasks that keep their careers interesting. They wouldn't have it any other way. **Clockwise, from top left:** From left, Cody Accord, Dane Diehl and Ryan Dodson place rubber blankets over energized power lines near Blue Knob during annual on-the-job training in mid-September. **Top right:** Diehl finds himself in a maze of rhododendrons in North Carolina after Hurricane Helene. Valley REC crews were among those to help restore power after the storm. **Bottom right:** From left, Curtis Starr, Jason Wilson, Diehl and Seth Glover pause for an early morning photo Oct. 8 before leaving the Shade Gap office to assist with power restoration efforts in North Carolina. **Bottom center:** Logan Booher takes time to answer electric safety questions from young attendees at Mapleton Volunteer Fire Company's open house Oct. 10. **Bottom left:** Matt Fish, left, and Riley Price demonstrate that a leather glove offers no protection against high voltage during a hot line demo at Mapleton Volunteer Fire Company's open house.

