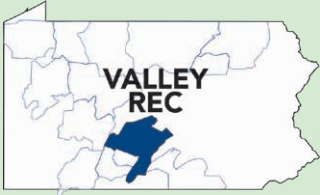


Valley Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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

Proper Planting Technique Gets Trees Off to a Good Start



KEVIN DETWILER

WITH Milder weather fast approaching, you might be thinking about planting trees. Spring is often considered the best time because the air and soil temperatures are warming and there is typically an abundance of rain. Although digging up trees and transplanting them should be done in fall and winter while they're dormant, container trees and bare-root stock acclimate well to being planted in the spring climate.

When contemplating the placement of your new tree, make sure the site conditions are acceptable for the tree you are planting. For example, can the species grow to a mature height without encroaching on buildings or utility wires? Will it have access to adequate sunlight and moisture? Considering factors like these before planting will ensure your tree has a long, happy life in its new forever home.

After the proper tree species and location are selected, it's time to plant. Your first step is to dig a hole twice the diameter of the container, or root system, with a depth equal to the depth of the potted root ball. The top of the soil on the root ball should be even with the ground level of the soil when placed in the hole. When planting bare-root stock, make sure the root flare (the swelled portion of the lower trunk where roots begin) is placed just above the soil level.

Once your tree is properly positioned in the hole, backfill around the root ball or bare roots with the soil you originally removed from the hole. Lightly compress the soil by hand as you backfill around the root ball, but do not tamp the soil and compact it. Soil compaction causes water run-off, lack of aeration, and greatly restricts the ability of fibrous roots to extend from the tree.

Once the hole is backfilled and the plant is secure, make sure any excess soil is removed from the top of the root ball. It's always a good idea to cover the top of the root ball with a light layer of mulch, which helps with water retention.

Many newly planted trees require support while their root systems develop. The most commonly used materials are wooden stakes and small diameter rope. Be sure to use a cordage material that will not cut into the tree bark when you tie it to the trunk. The support system should be removed after one or two growing seasons.

It's very important to water your tree immediately after planting. Newly planted trees typically require water two to three times a week for the first year until they go dormant in the fall. Obviously, this will depend on the amount of rainfall you are experiencing.

Best of luck with all your planting projects this season! 🌱

KEVIN DETWILER

UTILITY FORESTER/ARBORIST



Golf Tournament to Benefit Four Local Children, School Teacher

DOUG ROLES, VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBER SERVICES

VALLEY RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE (REC) will hold its 2025 Annual Benefit Golf Outing Thursday, June 19, at the Huntingdon Country Club. The event will benefit four area children and an elementary school teacher who all face serious health challenges.

As in previous years, the tournament will feature a morning and afternoon flight of golfers in a shotgun-start, best-ball scramble.

The co-op's golf committee began planning for this year's event in January. Valley REC's corporate office and three district offices will close the day of the tournament to allow staff to assist on the course with the employee-driven fundraiser, which also includes a silent auction.

"An event like this creates an opportunity for our employees and the community to lend a hand to some friends and neighbors who are facing truly tough challenges," Valley

REC President & CEO Rich Bauer says. "We're grateful for all the support of our golfers, sponsors, and donors and hope the tournament helps ease the burden on these families."

Beneficiaries

Jett Ickes was born in November almost three months prematurely and has required a breathing tube since birth. He's spent his first months of life in a neonatal intensive care unit battling infections. Despite his rough start, he has tripled in size, and his parents, Jared and Madysen Ickes of Altoona, are hopeful he'll be weaned from the ventilator and improve.

Blake Reed, infant son of Aaron and Cierra Reed of Altoona, has bright eyes and a beautiful smile despite facing multiple health challenges. He was born in October with Down syndrome and several heart defects requiring surgery. He also requires tubes for

feeding and medicine. He's had lengthy hospital stays, but the Reed family says he's fighting to come home.

Theodore "Theo" Joseph Hess-Garcia, the 1-year-old son of Collin Hess and Isabel Garcia-Fernandez of Waterfall, was born with an airway disorder that requires him to use a ventilator and a feeding tube. He has a brain condition that led to epilepsy, and he will need hip surgery later this year. Though he will require lifelong care, Theo's family is hopeful about his prognosis.

Dalana Snyder, daughter of Dale Hamman and Robin Snyder of McVeytown, is a senior at Mount Union Area High School. In April 2024, she was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia after bleeding complications from tonsil/adenoid surgery. Dalana, 18, developed multiple infections through her first four rounds of chemo, but thankfully the cancer is



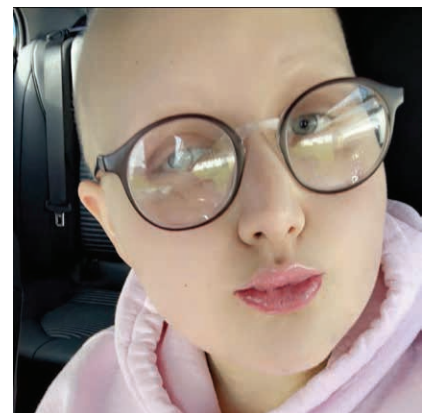
JETT IKKES



BLAKE REED



**THEODORE JOSEPH
HESS-GARCIA**



DALANA SNYDER

in remission. She is taking a chemotherapy pill all year long and making many trips to doctors in Lewistown and Danville.

Crissy Kyle of Huntingdon is a loving wife and mother. She and her husband, Andy, are the parents of two young children. Crissy was recently diagnosed with breast cancer. After surgery early this year, further treatment will be determined. Crissy is fondly known as “Mrs. Kyle” by her students at Standing Stone Elementary School.

Valley REC’s health and wellness committee organized its first benefit golf tournament in 2012. Since that time, the outing has evolved into an all-hands-on-deck event. The generous support of a wide range of businesses and individuals helps the beneficiaries better meet the financial challenges associated with serious illnesses and accidents and lets them know their community cares.

The co-op’s golf outing has raised approximately \$415,000 since its inception. The tournament registration fee is \$125 per player, which includes 18 holes of golf, a cart, lunch, dinner and various prizes.

For more information on registering a team, being a sponsor or donating an item for the silent auction, call 800-432-0680 or go online to valleyrec.com and click on the golf outing button. 🏌️



ANDY AND CRISSY KYLE



FUN AND FUNDRAISING: Above – Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) employees and other golfers prepare for the start of the morning flight of the co-op’s 2024 tournament at Huntingdon Country Club. Below – The annual benefit golf outing includes a silent auction. A wide variety of items are donated each year. Donors may drop off items at any Valley REC office.



CO-OP OFFERS TWO MEMBER ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) offers two assistance programs for our consumers. For members not already familiar with these offerings, the following information explains the programs and how to apply.

Members who are experiencing an employment-related hardship or loss of income may apply for assistance through the **Members Helping Members (MHM) program**. Examples of qualifying circumstances include layoffs, business or plant closings, and reductions of hours. To receive help, those in need must complete and return a confidential application for consideration.

MHM is funded through voluntary contributions by the co-op’s membership. Consumers may make contributions to the MHM program in several ways. Members can elect to have the amount of their monthly bill rounded up to the nearest whole dollar. The money in excess of the actual bill goes to the fund. Members can also make either a one-time or a recurring donation in any amount when paying their electric bill.

Applications and donation forms are available at valleyrec.com, under the “Programs & Services” tab, or by contacting the co-op at 800-432-0680.

The Community Service Grant Program (CSG) provides funds to Valley REC members experiencing financial hardship, service organizations such as fire and ambulance companies, and educators who need support materials to teach blocks of instruction related to electricity or the cooperative business model.

The program offers grants in three categories: energy assistance, civic and community programs, and education. Grants are available up to \$500 for energy assistance and up to \$1,000 for civic and community organizations or educational programs. Consumers who need help with their electric bills due to illness, mounting medical bills and other life events may apply for the energy assistance grant.

The money to fund this initiative comes from unclaimed capital credits refunds.

As with the MHM program, CSG applications are available on the co-op’s website or by contacting any of our offices.



Smart Thermostats Help Homeowners Track Energy Use, Tailor Home Heating, Cooling

HOMEOWNERS WHO WANT TO HAVE greater awareness and control of their energy use may want to consider a Wi-Fi-enabled digital thermostat. For those not familiar with so-called “smart” thermostats, the units enable consumers to track their electric use, schedule home heating and cooling times and change settings remotely through cellphones and tablets.

Smart thermostats have been on the market since the Ecobee brand Wi-Fi-enabled unit was introduced in 2007. Industry analysts estimate about 16% of U.S. homes with internet access now have a smart thermostat. That number is predicted to nearly double, to 38 million homes, by 2026, according to online data from Parks Associates and S&P Global Market Intelligence.

“It’s the next step in the evolution of trying to figure out questions like: Why is my bill what it is? Why is my wintertime use greater than any other time of year? What’s the run time of my heating system?” says Travis Kuhstos, Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) energy specialist. “With a smart thermostat, you’re going to get those answers pretty quick.”

More accuracy

Travis says smart thermostat data helps consumers paint a more accurate picture of their consumption. The information can help consumers troubleshoot high bills and tailor electric use to their lifestyle, he says.

Don Grabill of Martinsburg, a Valley REC member since 1973, got a Sensi smart thermostat in 2022. He uses it to control temperature settings for his oil forced-air heating system.

“When my original one went bad, I wanted to go with a smart thermostat,” Don explains. “What I want to know is how much fuel I use per hour.”

Don has an electric heat pump on a separate thermostat. He uses the smart thermostat to regulate the oil system’s overnight heating to supplement the heat pump during cold spells without unnecessarily burning oil.

“I use this at night,” he says. “If the heat pump bottoms out, it only goes so low before the oil kicks on. And it shows last night’s usage.”

Smart thermostats are available at any box store or online. Don purchased his through eBay. Prices range from \$50 to \$200 depending on the brand and features. As much as homeowners keep an eye on electric use while at home, smart thermostats make heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems accessible when you’re away from home, too.

“You can control your thermostat and see what your use is from a distance,” Travis says. “For example, what if you were leaving a seasonal home or cabin after a holiday or



TOUCH OF A BUTTON: Don Grabill, right, a Valley Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) member near Martinsburg, Blair County, shows Valley REC Energy Specialist Travis Kuhstos the smart thermostat and accompanying cellphone app he uses to control his home’s heating and cooling.

hunting season and you realize you left the heat turned up? With a smart thermostat, you can turn that down without having to drive back to the location.”

Travis adds owners of second homes or cabins often underestimate how much power is still being used when the property is vacant. Smart thermostats can make property owners better aware of heating and cooling when the structure is not being used.

“It also registers the humidity level in the house,” Travis explains. “And humidity is important to health and comfort.”

Cutting costs

Touchstone Energy lists one of the top benefits of smart thermostats as saving money. An average American household spends between \$1,000 to \$2,000 annually on heating and cooling. Equipping an HVAC system with smart technology can help families stay comfortable and save year-round. Touchstone estimates consumers can save at least 10% on heating and cooling annually.

The devices can also learn your habits and daily routines and adjust accordingly. A smart thermostat can even interact with other devices, such as your smartphone or fitness tracker, to tell how soon you’ll arrive home or when you’ll wake up. Based on that extra data, the thermostat can automatically adjust the settings without you having to lift a finger. Many types of smart thermostats provide reports or allow you to access your analytics in an app to observe how your energy use has changed over time. Smart thermostats can make your home safer, too. Many smart thermostats are equipped with safety settings that can turn your HVAC system on or off — depending on the situation — and alert you immediately. 📱